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Shouting towards the Sky: the role of religious individuals, communities, organisations and institutions in support for refugees and asylum seekers

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Introduction

> Many social scientists see in religious conviction an eclipse of reason, and in religious motivation a constraint of enlightened social behaviour. Buttressing these perspectives is the observation that religious identity and religious differences are often seemingly the sources of prejudice and violence. In much social science literature there is an aversion to treating religion as the basis for progressive social solidarity. (Candland, 2000, p.355-6)

Religious people and communities of many different faith traditions have a long history of aid for those in need, including those fleeing war, poverty or persecution. Religious orders and monasteries of various traditions offered places of safety and aid to the poor, and from the 19th century onwards religiously based charities of many different faith backgrounds have become involved in humanitarian assistance of various kinds (Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013; UNHCR, 2013; Ager, 2011; Ferris, 2005).

In recent times there has been a developing interest in the role of 'faith-based' organisations in various aspects of forced migration and development (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013, 2011a, 2011b; Ferris, 2010). There has also been interest in studying the religious factors causing forced migration and the role of religion in coping mechanisms in disaster or conflict situations (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013; Refugee Studies Centre, 2012; Real, 2010).

However, as the quotation from Candland above suggests, the religious belief of individuals, and organised religion and its role in social action, have neither been very visible or indeed taken very seriously, across the social sciences generally or in refugee studies in particular (May, 2011; Reale, 2010; Kirmani, Khan and Palmer, 2009; Ensor, 2003; Gozdziak and Shandy, 2002). This is not to say that religion and faith are never touched upon in the context of social action or in respect of refugee support, but studies tend to focus on specific and narrow contexts, rather than draw together different themes or strands.

This paper argues that religious faith is becoming ever more important in the current environment of increasingly harsh immigration regimes across the world, and the simultaneous proliferation of conflict, disaster and deprivation prompting people to seek refuge elsewhere (Hatton, 2011). It examines some of the wide ranging ways in which religion currently plays a part in refugee and asylum seeker assistance, and seeks to contribute a bibliography of sources drawn from a disparate range of disciplines.

Reed (2006) argued nearly a decade ago that Western democracies were becoming increasingly unwelcoming, and talked of a 'tragic conflict in much secular ethics today as applicable to asylum seekers' and refugees, and that 'action based on humanitarian principles' appeared to be becoming 'increasingly difficult to sell to electorates' (p.4). A similar point was made in the context of France by Fassin (2008), who asked how a society can at once express the wish to be compassionate, whilst at the same time embracing repressive actions by the state. Mason and Forbes (1994), writing in the 1990s, argued that 'democracy and human rights appear to be pulling in different directions' (para. 15.1), and it could be argued that in many ways little has changed.

Authors on the European context point to increasingly negative environments in a number of states, linked in some cases to the rise of right wing parties in politics and more negative public attitudes (see Hoog and de Vroom, 2014 on Belgium; Fredlund-Blomst, 2014 on Sweden; Pyykkonen, 2009 on Finland). Other authors have pointed to negative public attitudes linked to scarce resources such as housing, health care and jobs (Schenk, 2008), and the perceived link between immigration and terrorism (May, 2011; Leddy, 2010).

Both public policies and attitudes of electorates may be seen to be moving against refugees, who are increasingly seen as either burdens or potential extremists or terrorists (Kilps, 2008). In many discussions images are raised of states or whole continents becoming 'closed' to outsiders. For example in the context of Australia, Belcher (2014) talks of the country 'being shut'; Lippert (2009) points to an increasingly authoritarian stance in Canada; despite presidential executive action the United States still confronts major problems in respect of those fleeing conflict and deprivation in Central and South America arriving via Mexico (see for examples Norris, 2014; Romanov, 2014). Hardly a week passes without desperate people arriving on European shores by boat from Africa, often having been rescued from the sea (Mittermaier, 2009).

Against this background, the response of individuals of faith, civil society faith organisations, church congregations and organised religious institutions appears to be becoming more important and visible. Such organisations are increasingly important in the support of those internally displaced through conflict or disaster, and those arriving in, or attempting to remain in, Western Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia.

UNHCR itself has recognised the value of the work of faith organisations, faith communities and faith leaders (see for example UNHCR, 2006; Zapor, 2014, and for a United Nations context see Petersen, 2010). This focus increased in 2012 when the fifth High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges addressed the topic of 'Faith and Protection' (Riera and Poirier, 2014; UNHCR, 2013). UNHCR works in collaboration with a range of faith organisations in many countries, providing support and protection, although it should be noted that in a recent survey, 85% of these were either Christian or Muslim (UNHCR, 2013).

Governments have frequently sought to involve faith organisations both in the support of refugees, and in the provision of welfare services generally (for examples see Dinham, 2013; Kettell, 2013; Simon, 2013; Eby et al, 2011; Jaworsky, 2010; Slade, 2010; Bano and Nair, 2007; Goldsmith et al, 2006; Nawyn, 2005; Smith and Sosin, 2001). The World Bank also has a history of interest in the role of faith organisations in combating world poverty, although this has declined somewhat recently (Haynes, 2012).

Many large and small initiatives by faith communities and religious institutions all over the world contribute to community relations and support in a myriad of ways, often largely unnoticed other than by their immediate beneficiaries. In the UK, the 'Who Is My Neighbour' project run by the Methodist Church in Sheffield, Yorkshire, aims to ease community tensions by bringing people together to talk, communicate, help break down barriers and dispel stereotypes and misconceptions (Methodist Church, 2014a). Across the UK most communities have large and small faith organisations supporting local people, including many Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and other groups, in addition to those based in various Christian traditions, for example Quakers. Many of these exist exclusively for the support of refugees or asylum seekers, or include this as an aspect of their work.

Faith organisations of all kinds in the United States deliver services specifically for the support of refugees. Given the nature of current conflicts, many of the refugees are Muslim but most of the faith organisations involved in their resettlement are either Christian or Jewish, for example, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. Many of these receive public funding for resettlement services, but given widespread Islamophobia and suspicion of refugees coming from predominantly Muslim countries, such organisations do not necessarily receive strong public support (see eg, Hohman, 2014). In addition, ministers go into detention centres to provide spiritual and practical support for detained irregular migrants (Bains, 2008; Progress Illinois, 2008).

In Germany, the Save Me campaign works across 50 German cities and towns to improve refugee resettlement through work with local communities, church congregations and politicians, and recruiting local people to volunteer as mentors for newly arrived refugees (ICMC/ProAsyl, 2013). Muslim, Jewish and other faith organisations provide a range of support for refugees in both conflict zones and those countries in which people seek refuge, including Canada (for example the Islamic Association of Toronto) and Australia (for example the Muslim Women's Association of Australia).

The numbers of people being displaced by natural disasters and climate change continue to increase, and faith organisations and communities also contribute to the protection of people internally displaced by natural disaster. For example, after the 2004 tsunami monks in Thailand opened temples to shelter survivors, and in Australia churches were opened to help those caught in the terrible bush fires of 2009 (Reale, 2010). Islamic Relief provides disaster relief in many parts of the world, but also work on preventative measures to help communities respond to risks posed by changing environments.

Aim of the paper

Although academics have begun to investigate the role of 'faith-based organisations' in humanitarian and development work (see also McElhenney and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010), research for this current study has identified several major gaps which this paper will attempt to address.

Firstly, there has been little focus on the religious basis within major world religions for support and welcome for refugees and asylum seekers. What do these belief systems have to say about refugees? Why should being religious prompt people to want to help those in need, and refugees in particular? What are the mechanisms of religious belief itself that prompt individuals to respond in particular ways to refugees and others in need? Faith organisations and religious institutions depend upon individuals of faith to create the environment and conditions where support can be offered to those seeking refuge. Yet why and how these religious mechanisms operate is little discussed in refugee or migration studies literature. As the editors of the November 2014 issue of Forced Migration Review comment in their opening remarks, "It is easier to measure the activities inspired by faith than to measure the difference that faith makes" (Couldrey and Herson, Editorial, FMR 48, 2014).

Secondly, how does religious belief or affiliation affect which specific individuals or groups are helped or supported? It is too simplistic to say that being religious will lead to a wish to support refugees. What are the factors affecting who is helped, in what circumstances and by whom?

Thirdly, research for this paper has highlighted that support and help for refugees and asylum seekers by people of faith and faith organisations has become intensely political. It brings people and organisations into complex and frequently conflictual relationships with the state.

This paper will address the above three points, setting them within the context of faith-based support for refugees more generally, and with a particular emphasis on Western Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia. The central arguments will be addressed through the examination of two specific examples: that of the practice of sanctuary provision, and a case study of the current situation of the treatment of asylum seekers in Australia. Before addressing these issues, the paper will first discuss some terminology and definitions related to faith organisations, and some of their varied characteristics.

Defining and labelling faith organisations

Religiously based organisations are a unique category within civil society, but within that category their diversity is great (UNHCR, 2013; Torry, 2005). There is little agreement on the terminology to employ when discussing organisations, groups or communities that have a religious connection and provide support for refugees, asylum seekers or the internally displaced. Indeed, Davis et al (2011) state that far too many studies talk about 'faith-based' organisations without making any attempt at definition.

Neither is there agreement on what types of organisation or institution should be included in the category, although the decision on what is included can affect the labels that are employed. Various typologies have been developed, and a synthesis of these would suggest that one might include: places of worship and their congregations; more formal projects and services delivered through places of worship (by paid workers, volunteers or a combination of these); the institutional structures of organised religions, including their local, national and trans-national networks; small local community groups and larger regional, national and international charities (Goldsmith et al, 2005; Ebaugh et al, 2003; Bano and Nair, 2007; Smith and Sosin, 2001).

A number of authors refer to 'faith-based' organisations as a general catchall term. According to Bano and Nair (2007) this term originated in the US in the 1990s, before its more general adoption. However, the general applicability of the term 'faith-based' has been challenged. 'Based' can be seen as implying a foundation from which activities flow, but in some circumstances faith arguably has a greater centrality. Modern humanitarian principles dictate an impartial selection of beneficiaries, based only on need and concepts of universality. However, there are alternative understandings of humanitarian action, particularly in non-Northern/Western/Christian settings, which Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013) call 'humanitarianisms of the global South'. In this context it is not uncommon for faith organisations to deliver all of their services to those of their own faith, which may be viewed in terms of communal solidarity. This links with a communal conception of human rights, which rather than focusing on the rights of individuals, sees rights inextricably linked to the group and to the land, for example in indigenous communities (Wiessner, 2011). Organisations operating in these traditions might be better described as 'faith-centred' (Orji, 2011; Bano and Nair, 2007), as faith is a fundamental aspect of what they do.

It can also be argued that 'faith-based' is too general a term because of the vast differences between major religions and the way their civil society organisations and religious communities are organised. For example, some argue that Muslim and Christian organisations should not be categorised together. Davis et al (2011) suggest that in the Islamic tradition,

religion is so central to everyday life that understandings of faith organisations are necessarily different to those arising from some other traditions. Additionally, there can be greater differences between the various Christian denominations than between some faith organisations and secular ones (El Banna, 2010; Ferris, 2010). It can also be argued that there are many differences within organisations as to the meaning and expression of religion to be found in so called 'faith-based' organisations, resulting in the term being less than useful (Ebaugh et al, 2003). Smith and Sosin (2001) prefer 'faith-related' to 'faith-based' as they argue that the latter excludes some organisations that should be included in the category.

There has also been a suggestion that 'value-based' might be a more useful term to get around these differences. However, it could be argued that most, if not all, civil society organisations have a value base that guides their work. Some prefer using the term 'religion' rather than 'faith'. Goldsmith et al (2006) suggest that the type of organisation under discussion could be identified as either one that is affiliated to a religious body (such as a church, mosque, etc) or one that is religiously motivated. The term 'religiously tied' is also suggested to overcome the rather vague notion of 'faith'. But some organisations where all the work is religiously motivated and workers/volunteers are all clearly and overtly of one faith may choose to reject the 'faith' label altogether, as it may suggest that they are motivated by conversion rather than service to others (Zaman, 2014).

It is also argued that it could be problematic to talk about a congregation or group of worshippers as a 'faith community'. It is not necessarily true that all the leaders, officials, lay attendees, paid workers or volunteers would be working together for a common cause, or engaged to the same degree, if at all, in any social action programme that might be organised from that place of worship (Dinham et al, 2009).

It can be seen from the above that there is little agreement on how to label the type of organisation under discussion, or indeed which types of organisation should be included in the category. This paper intends to include discussion of all the types of organisation mentioned in the discussion of typology above. However the two central case studies to be highlighted focus largely on responses by local places of worship and those connected with them, and the wider institutional networks that these are linked into, rather than formally constituted charities. This author therefore tends to agree with Ebaugh and colleagues (2003) that the term 'faith-based' is not useful, certainly in the context of this paper. In this paper, the term 'faith organisation' will be used, as it implies a wider category and less formality than 'faith-based' might suggest.

Organisational characteristics

Despite this disagreement over definitions and terminology, some common characteristics can be identified across many different types of organisation, programme and context. Many authors agree that religiously-based refugee support and humanitarian action of all kinds is seen as 'trustworthy' by beneficiaries (Jaworsky, 2010; Kirmani, Khan and Palmer, 2008; Goldsmith et al, 2006; Davis et al, 2011), although Kirmani and colleagues point out that the trust may not necessarily arise solely from the religious nature of the organisation, but may be equally contingent on the efficacy of the support offered.

Faith organisations are often seen as 'safe spaces', either literally, such as in sanctuary provision (below) or disaster relief, or as a refuge from being judged or marginalised (Jaworsky, 2010; Reale, 2010; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013; Refugee Studies Centre,

2012), although of course these organisations may also be sites of discrimination (Kettell, 2013). Faith organisations may also be viewed as independent and outside state control or political controversy, although this is not always the case (Davis et al, 2011).

In the context of international humanitarian relief and development, such organisations can be strengthened by being part of a worldwide network, which can bring both a sense of solidarity and physical and financial resources (Davis et al, 2011; Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013). Physical and human resources are often mentioned in respect of the value of faith organisations, both in humanitarian relief settings and elsewhere. Religious buildings are often used for shelter, community uses, meeting places and so on. Bells and loudspeakers can be used for warning of risks. Networks of volunteers may be mobilised for many purposes, as they bring a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013; Faith Based Regeneration Network, 2010).

Faith organisations can be very useful for helping communities deal with risk and adapt to change; familiar rituals, common beliefs and prayer can bring people together in difficult situations and provide something stable when everything else seems to be changing (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013; Slade, 2010; Wilson, 2014; Mora, 2013). For example, such organisations may facilitate the observance of important rituals or religious practices, such as fasting and specific prayer times. This is important in conflict or other situations where such observances may be difficult, or their importance to displaced people may not be recognised by other agencies (Kirmani, Khan and Palmer, 2008). Specific faith organisations can also help facilitate the integration of certain groups of refugees, for example Baha'i organisations working with Iranian refugees in Australia (May, 2011).

By their very nature, faith organisations may sometimes be viewed as wishing to proselytize alongside their other work. Some may do this overtly, others not at all, and writers vary in their views about how common this is. For example, Ferris (2005) provides an example of Christian aid organisations seeking to convert Muslim beneficiaries in the aftermath of the Indonesian tsunami. The predominance of Christian refugee aid organisations in Australia and the fact that most refugees arriving there are non-Christian (May, 2011) could be seen as problematic. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager (2013) also see some danger of evangelising, although others argue that the danger and prevalence of this is exaggerated (May, 2004). It is hard to verify the degree to which proselytizing occurs, but humanitarian principles would suggest that it should never present a barrier to those in need.

However, despite some widely recognised common characteristics shared by faith organisations, there is still considerable discussion as to whether or not there is really any difference between faith and secular organisations. When discussing larger charities and non-governmental organisations there may be little perceptible difference. Organisational structures may be very similar, many staff or volunteers may not be of the particular faith related to the organisation, and the organisations may be under very similar financial pressures, particularly if they are reliant on government or other public funding (Smith and Sosin, 2001; Goldsmith et al, 2006).

This paper argues that a central difference between faith organisations and secular organisations – certainly amongst smaller organisations, communities based in places of worship, and institutional structures and networks of organised religion – is the religious belief itself. In the introduction it was noted that faith organisations rely on individual people of faith to drive and facilitate their work, and it is important to understand the mechanisms

through which religious faith leads to a desire to help others, and refugees in particular. The following sections of the paper will therefore attempt to address some of these issues.

Religion and migration studies

There is some academic discussion of pro-social behaviour from a sociological perspective, including what major classical sociologists can tell us about why people respond positively to those in need (Bornstein, 2009). One can find discussions of major classical sociological perspectives on the role of religion in society (Tomalin, 2007). However a focus on religion in the context of forced migration is quite recent and limited (Eghdamien, 2014; May, 2011; Kirmani, Khan and Palmer, 2008; Gozdziak and Shandy, 2002).

It is important here to make clear the difference between studying organisational and instrumental aspects of the work of faith organisations, and examining the impact of the theology underlying any particular belief system, and what this might have to say about helping refugees (May, 2011; Kirmani, Khan and Palmer, 2008). As Groody (2009) has noted, although it is important for migration studies to receive the attention of a wide range of disciplines:

> Theology however is almost never mentioned in major works or at centres of migration studies… some research has been done on migration and religion from a sociological perspective but there is virtually nothing on the topic from a theological perspective… theology seems to enter the academic territory from the outside as if it were a disciplinary refugee. (p.3)

Similarly, Groody notes, theologians seem rarely to touch on the topic of immigration. Groody offers a framework that illustrates why theology may make a valuable contribution in relation to the issue of migration. Migration has been problematized in many contexts, including becoming implicated in worsening community and ethnic relations and recent rises in support for far right political views. Groody sees religious faith as an enabler to bridge a number of divides between those considered 'illegal' or 'alien' by negative public opinion and anti-immigrant sentiment, and the host populations, institutions and governments they come into contact with, and who exercise power over their situation. A more detailed discussion of Groody's framework in relation to the Christian faith in particular will follow later in this paper.

In addition to understanding the mechanisms through which religious faith prompts individuals to respond positively to refugees and other vulnerable migrants, an important reason for including religion in work on forced migration is that, in much of the world, the division between the secular and the religious is much less clearly defined in the everyday lives of individuals and communities, if not almost invisible. For many, religion is intrinsic to everyday life, and separating it from other activities is a false dichotomy (Levitt, 2012; Reale, 2010; Ensor, 2003).

In fact some may find the idea of such separation incomprehensible. Some may not even have a specific word in their language for 'religion' as it is so central to their identity. Holenstein (2005) provides several practical examples of this, and warns of taking a purely modern Western view of religion, that can be easily divided from the rest of life. Religion can be used as a 'consumer oriented self-service shop' of ideas and beliefs that can be built into a 'patchwork spirituality' (see also Fust, 2005).

This lack of division between religion and other aspects of life in many cultures is important when considering why religion is relevant to studies of forced migration. Refugees predominantly come from countries and cultures where this experience of religion is more likely. Additionally religion is often extremely important to refugees in that it can provide strength in very difficult times, support integration into new communities, and act as a driver for agency and empowerment (Kirmani, Khan and Palmer, 2011).

Having established some justifications for the inclusion of religion in work on forced migration, the paper will now discuss some aspects of what the major religions have to say about welcoming strangers. This is useful in understanding the mechanisms underlying the activities of faith organisations and institutions (Bano and Nair, 2007).

What do religions say about welcoming refugees?

One argument as to why people may be indifferent or hostile to the situation of refugees or those seeking asylum, is that they find it difficult or impossible to imagine themselves in a similar situation, or to empathise with an experience so different from their own. It has been suggested that holding a religious belief may enable people to step outside themselves, and experience what Wilson (2013c) calls 'other-centredness'. This is seen as a real and deep appreciation of the situation of others, and the need to take action.

Although extremely diverse in their beliefs and practices, the teachings of the major world religions have many commonalities related to charity, benevolence and the assistance of those in need. Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism and Sikhism all have a tradition of love of humanity, giving and compassion, and religious figures such as saints or prophets provide examples of behaviour to followers (Bano and Nair, 2007; Saroglou, 2006; Schulman and Barkouki-Winter, 2000).

For example, in Hinduism respect and honour towards the recipients of aid is very important, although Bano and Nair (2007) point out that in Hinduism gifts of knowledge and spiritual enlightenment may be seen as of greater value than practical assistance. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism all have central and detailed teachings on giving to those in need.

In Islam there are many passages in the Qur'an requiring hospitality to strangers (Rahaei, 2012). The prophet Muhammad, as well as Abraham and Moses, all needed to flee to safety and seek refuge amongst strangers. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad's flight from Mecca, known as the Hidra, is considered so significant that it marks the commencement of the Islamic calendar (Kirmani, Khan and Palmer, 2008). There is a strong emphasis in Islam on what is required of hosts and their behaviour towards guests; guests who are also strangers. Schulman and Barkouki-Winter (2000) point out that the support provided to strangers is their right, and that the relationship between host and guest is in fact a triangular one, encompassing host, guest and God. The host owes a duty to God to provide for the stranger.

Many authors conclude that there is very strong support in the Qur'an and Islamic law for the rights and protection of refugees (Rahaei, 2012; UNHCR, 2012; Elmadmad, 2008). There are clearly set out Islamic principles of asylum and human rights, where asylum is the right of all who seek protection, and is owed by anyone of whom protection is asked, not merely the duty of states (Kirmani, Khan and Palmer, 2008). A UNHCR document on refugees and Islam, produced as a result of the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Faith and Protection (2012) concludes that a wider promotion of Islamic teachings on asylum and refugee protection would be beneficial to the promotion of rights and practices in Muslim states.

In the Christian tradition there are a number of teachings and scriptures that point to a requirement to welcome and support 'strangers'. Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement in the US in the 1930s, saw the homeless and destitute people she helped every day as the embodiment of Christ himself (Day, 1945). This understanding of the 'stranger' in need as Christ is mentioned in many other writings on the Christian basis for hospitality towards strangers and those in need (Kilps, 2008; Schenk, 2008; Schulman and Barkouki-Winter, 2000).

As noted above, Groody (2009) argues that religion, and specifically the Christian religion, can be a means to break down a number of barriers or divides. Firstly, theology can bridge what Groody calls the 'person-problem' divide, or the divide between the 'labellers' and the 'labelled', or the 'legal' and the 'illegal'. Groody argues that identifying certain individuals as 'alien' or 'illegal' belies their value as human beings, and that religion can remind people that all human beings are of equal value and should be afforded equal dignity and respect, a teaching common to most major religions. It helps redress power imbalances and restore the agency of refugees, who can become objectified and powerless.

Secondly Groody argues that religion can bridge what he calls the 'divine-human' divide. This part of his framework is essentially Christian in its perspective. For Groody, Christ migrated to the physical world and therefore illustrates that God recognises no borders, borders that are only created by humans (see also Schenk, 2008). Thirdly, Groody identifies a 'human-human' divide, where people erect barriers between each other. Groody argues that the 'international ministry' of the church breaks down some of these barriers and brings people together, again a perspective that can be applied across several different religious traditions.

In the Christian tradition various documents have been produced regarding church teachings on immigration and asylum issues, what Belcher refers to as a 'theology of refugees' (Belcher, 2014). For example, in its guidance for congregations in Refugee Week 2014 (Methodist Church, 2014b) the Methodist Church in England points to scriptural commands not to oppress but instead to love the 'sojourner'. The sojourner should be provided with food, refreshment and refuge. Other passages imply an almost equal status for sojourners, although they must abide by the law. The piece invites readers to consider current UK treatment of asylum seekers with these scriptural passages in mind, drawing a contrast between the biblical commands and the perceived harshness, lack of welcome and enforced poverty that those seeking asylum might experience.

Pieces on Catholic social teaching on refugees and asylum seekers (for example Lummert, 2014; U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011; Brackley, 2010; Cornish, 2002) tend to focus on the common humanity and dignity of all persons, the rights of people coming before those of governments, and a focus on practical work to support those in need of help and to address overly harsh immigration laws and procedures.

Belcher also cites the example of Jesus as a guide for Christian behaviour towards refugees, and advocates a very practical response rooted in social action, rather than a merely theoretical, moral or ethical stance. Belcher also raises an interesting perspective on why Christians should welcome strangers and work to help refugees and asylum seekers. Belcher suggests that all Christians are in fact refugees, temporarily exiled in the world whilst waiting to be admitted to Heaven, and that Christ himself is in fact a sort of immigration minister, setting out the guidelines for the refugees to follow (Hauerwas and Willimon, 2004, cited in Belcher, 2014).

In the Jewish tradition, many of the Old Testament examples of commands to welcome strangers that are cited for Christians are equally relevant (Schulman and Barkouki-Winter, 2000). In the current context, many Jews and Jewish communities are involved in providing shelter and support for those fleeing conflict in Central America, and arriving over the border into the US, particularly women and children. One of the motivations expressed by Jews in these communities is that they see themselves as potential refugees or victims of persecution. They are therefore prompted to want to help others actually in such situations.

There is a communal memory of Jewish history, including experiences in the holocaust, which is named by Jewish communities as motivation for these current helping activities (Norris, 2014; Wilensky, 2014). One Jewish community leader in Philadelphia cited the death of five close family members in the holocaust as a major motivation for her work providing sanctuary for migrants threatened with deportation (Lee and Jenkins, 2014).

In some cases acts of support for refugees may cross different religious traditions, and also draw in those with no faith, bringing people together for many different motives. The Posada sin Frontera is an annual gathering of support for desperate people trying to cross the US/Mexico border. The event has taken place for more than 20 years in what has become known as 'Friendship Park', where people from both sides of the border gather at Christmas as an act of solidarity. Participants are primarily Catholics but many are of other religions and none.

The event is rooted in the idea of biblical hospitality, drawing references from the story of Jesus arriving with Mary and Joseph with nowhere to stay, a motif which is contained in many pieces on Christian teachings on hospitality to the 'stranger'. Alongside this religious motivation, the event draws people who wish to demonstrate solidarity with those of the same ethnic background, those who wish to be better informed about the issues, motivations of secular ethics, and in some cases the wish to make a political point about US immigration and border control policies. Some people may have several of these motivations at once (Hondigneu-Sitelo et al, 2004).

An opposing view?

Having considered religious teachings on support for refugees, it is also necessary to ask whether the ethical arguments for support of refugees and asylum seekers found in religious teachings can be used to oppose support to refugees. As Montalto (2008) puts it, "Is there an ethical argument for immigration policy reform or can the ethical argument work both ways, i.e. bolstering immigration restriction and enforcement as well as legalisation and expansive admission policies?"

Montalto notes religious teachings that would seem to justify a liberal approach to immigration policies and hospitality towards 'strangers', whilst warning of the dangers of 'cherry picking' religious passages for what one wants to see. Montalto then goes on to argue that it is also possible to find ethical/religious arguments for limiting immigration. Might the 'common good' of a state and its citizens be better served by restricting immigration if resources are scarce? How does a government balance the needs of poor citizens and the needs of poor immigrants?[1]

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[1] For a discussion of these issues, see Reed (2006) and Gibney (2004).

Montalto concludes that whatever the perspective, the subject of immigration policy can only benefit from an ethical framework grounded in religious teachings if this serves to ensure that the immigrant is not objectified, either as an unwanted alien or a valuable economic commodity. Even positive attitudes towards immigrants risk being very disempowering, as in the rush to provide strong arguments against harsh policies, refugees and asylum seekers can be reduced to sets of valued skills or economic units. Wilson (2013c) argues that compassion should not rely on whether or not the person can make an economic contribution, but on their need as fellow human beings with intrinsic dignity and value. Religion, Wilson argues, serves to remind people of this.

The theme of the agency of the refugee is not new, and has been a subject for many classical treatments by such as Levinas, Arendt and Butler (Allard, 2013). The refugee is often portrayed as a passive victim, firstly through their original persecution, and then through being subjected to the legal and state processes they are required to negotiate in order to seek refuge elsewhere. Allard (2013) argues that the framing of asylum seekers as passive victims, powerless and voiceless, enables their invisibility and enables unfair treatment or refusal of rights.

Drawing on the Exodus and Hidra stories, from Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions, Allard presents a 'theological ethics of flight' in which there is not only a religiously based obligation to provide hospitality to those seeking refuge, but alongside this, an obligation on refuge seekers themselves to flee persecution. Within this understanding, persecution is an affront to humanity and therefore there is an obligation to preserve the dignity of those made in the image of God, through flight if necessary. This perspective recognises the agency of the refugee and challenges the idea of a passive object.

Religion and volunteering

Several authors discuss how religion might impact on the incidence of volunteering. This is relevant to our discussion because formal and informal volunteering play a vital part in faith organisations' support for refugees in many contexts. Ruiter and de Graaf (2006) find that the degree to which a country is religious impacts on the amount of volunteering behaviour, rather than whether individuals themselves say that they attend religious services. Celik (2013), discussing religiously motivated volunteering in the Netherlands, concludes that religious people tend to be motivated to volunteer by the values of the religious communities to which they belong, rather than because they are more easily linked to networks.

Einolf (2011) links these two perspectives, arguing that the role of religious networks and the motivation of religious values and beliefs are not two distinct categories, but that people learn their religious values and beliefs through social interaction with others, and then internalise them so that they become part of their own identity and motivation for helping behaviour. Einolf also touches on intrinsic and extrinsic orientations to religion, suggesting that those with a more intrinsic orientation perceive themselves controlled by God and therefore prompted to help others. However in some circumstances, this can limit helping behaviour because the person may have a strong belief that God is in control, and God will therefore 'sort out' the problems.

Corrigall-Brown and Weldon (2012) examine evidence on the link between religion and volunteering in 51 countries. While previous studies had suggested that Protestantism was associated with higher levels of volunteering, the authors state that after re-examining the

evidence and controlling for other factors such as the degree of democracy in a country, the differences in incidence of volunteering between Protestant and other countries are statistically insignificant. They also warn that in many studies of this kind, membership of a religious denomination, or adherence to religious belief, when self-reported by research participants is often only nominal.

Religion and prejudice

One may also consider whether religion might contribute to prejudice against immigrants. Studies on this are not conclusive (Bohman, 2014). Bohman identifies both negative and positive relationships between religious faith and prejudice towards immigrants, although noting as problematic that most research on this is done in the United States, and in the context of Christianity. The relationship between the particular religious institution and the state is important, given that the state sets immigration policies, but this effect is not always taken into account in research. Bohman also discusses the relevance of religious orientations see Preston et al (2013), noting that people with an intrinsic religious orientation are less likely to be prejudiced towards immigrants than extrinsically orientated individuals or those with a fundamentalist view.

Hunsberger and Jackson (2005) also look at the relationship between religion and prejudice, although not specifically in the immigration context. They argue that much research on this issue is problematic because it fails to take into account subtleties of context, and that methods of collecting data often involve self-reporting by participants rather than actual behaviour. This is not ideal, as people may be reluctant to identify themselves as prejudiced, or simply not recognise their prejudiced attitudes.

They also find that the level to which religious people hold prejudiced attitudes depends on the depth of meaning the religion has to the person, the degree to which people are open to changing their mind about a particular issue, and the specific teachings of the religion on certain topics. It also depends on the degree to which the individual wishes to be a 'good group member' and conform to the majority view, or is willing to go outside this. For many people religion is a fundamental part of their identity, and such individuals might find it difficult to step outside the group expectation in order to help 'outsiders'.

Hall and colleagues (2010) ask why churchgoers in the US don't 'practice what they preach' and can exhibit racist attitudes and prejudice. They conclude that in the US, church congregations tend to be divided along racial lines, and that therefore attendants have a very strong identification with others of the same ethnic background with whom they worship. By contrast, however, some religious individuals and communities consciously seek to reach out across racial, religious and other differences, such as through the ecumenical movement (Kinnamon, 2000).

It is clear that holding a religious belief or belonging to a religious group will not necessarily lead to an absence of prejudicial views against immigrants generally, or refugees and asylum seekers in particular. This needs to be taken into account when considering the potential role for local faith organisations in supporting or advocating for refugees. The degree to which the religious institution is connected to the state, and what those state policies towards refugees and asylum seekers are, is important. Teachings of the religion on other topics related to minorities may influence attitudes to immigrants, and the drivers to adhere to group norms may be strong. This author concludes that, given all these points, the role of leaders and other

persons of influence within faith organisations and communities is crucial to how the group may respond towards refugees and asylum seekers.

Who do we help?

The above review examined some of the available explanations of why people of various faiths might engage in social action more generally, or support for refugees and asylum seekers specifically; but given all this, what actually happens in practice? How are the recipients of help selected or rejected? Do religious people and faith organisations and institutions espouse humanitarian principles of impartiality? In contexts where only a few may be helped how are those few chosen?

Selection of beneficiaries may be coloured by facets of the religious beliefs forming the foundation of the organisation. For example if the religion underpinning the organisation has specific teachings on homosexuality, this group may be, overtly or otherwise, excluded from benefit (Davis et al, 2011). Funding criteria may also be a factor in beneficiary selection; faith organisations may receive their funding through larger international religious structures which affect whom they help and in what circumstances. Small faith community initiatives may be more flexible in this regard and not need to abide by specific selection criteria (Barneche, 2014).

In the individual context, whether the act of giving is done on impulse or after rational consideration is also relevant. Although an impulsive reaction to give to those in need may appear preferable and more noble than calculation, it can be argued that such impulse does not allow for any strategy to improve the long term situation of those in need; rather it is a 'one off' gesture that may alleviate the situation temporarily but ultimately return the person to their same state of need (Bornstein, 2009).

Bornstein also examines contrasting ideas regarding reward for one's actions; should one give only to those who can make some useful return, or should there be no thought at all for any reward? The following passage from Hindu scripture clearly indicates that religions teaching:

> There should be no motive in charity and there should be no aim, direct or indirect, let those to whom you give be such that they cannot make any return to you, just as when shouting towards the sky there is no reply or nothing can be seen at the back of a mirror. (Miller, 1986, translation of the Bhagavad-Gita, chap.17 v.20, cited in Bornstein, 2009)

In contrast, a culture of personal responsibility, which can in fact turn towards blaming those deemed as 'unworthy', is identified in a number of contexts, particularly in evangelical protestant church communities. People may set out with motives of compassion, but in the end find it difficult to help those who don't appear to help themselves, or where results are not quick in coming, leading to 'compassion fatigue' (Elisha, 2008). Recipients are selected for their 'worthiness' of help and likelihood to change their behaviour, which is perceived by the helper as the cause of their misfortune and need for help. This is in direct opposition to the concept of giving without any thought of reward, exemplified in the extract from Hindu scripture above.

Emerson and Smith (2000) find similar ideas of blame and personal responsibility within evangelical congregations (see also Murphy, 2012). Rather than identifying discrimination

and other institutional causes for problems, they tend to identify the personal responsibility of the individual, who has been given free will by God. Ensor (2003) finds similar points regarding evangelical churches in Honduras, with an emphasis on hard work and being responsible for one's own situation. Reale (2010) noted that both catholics and evangelicals in Honduras saw disasters such as floods and hurricanes as punishment for sin, and 'part of God's plan', echoing the tendency to fatalism mentioned above. Thus such communities may be less responsive to those forced to seek refuge because of natural disasters, or indeed conflict.

The most often cited issue related to faith organisations and who they help is whether or not they abide by humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality when selecting beneficiaries. This was discussed above, recognising that in some cultures partiality can be viewed as natural solidarity (Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013). However, despite this recognition, there is frequent disquiet about an approach that is not universal (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013; Refugee Studies Centre, 2012).

It might help to note that that humanitarianism as a category is not, and has never been, a fixed concept with meanings stable over time and context. As noted by Davies (2012) humanitarianism has in the past encompassed such diverse issues and ideas as penal reform, animal welfare, what we now know as humanism, the abolition of slavery, workers' rights and trade unionism, the temperance movement and even eugenics. Humanitarianism has over time been considered overly sentimental, self-indulgent, disingenuous, and paternalistic. It has been religious, secular, philosophical, practical, emancipatory and controlling. This exploration by Davies highlights the fact that no concept is static; the broader point may be to encompass a range of cultural understandings and perspectives.

Politics and relations with the state

Much of the work of faith organisations with respect to refugees and asylum seekers
brings them into difficult, if not outright conflictual, relationships with the state. They often seek to challenge what are seen as unfair or overly harsh immigration and asylum regimes. For example, bishops and other senior clergy have criticised the UK government policy of dispersing asylum seekers (The Tablet, 2006; 2000a; 2000b; Campbell, 2012). In Germany church leaders started a movement to protest against the increasing number of migrants dying at sea whilst trying to reach the shores of Europe, including the holding of special memorial services for drowned migrants (Mittermaier, 2009). The Conference of European Churches and the Dutch charity Church in Action have for some time issued strong criticisms of the government of the Netherlands in relation to the treatment of destitute asylum seekers (Atkinson, 2014; Hintjens, 2013).

Sometimes support for refugees and asylum seekers may result in the arrest and prosecution of individuals of faith. For example in the case of the United States v. Millis (District of Arizona, 2009), an activist for the 'No More Deaths' campaign that works to support vulnerable migrants fleeing into the southern United States from Central America, was convicted for littering after leaving water canisters in the Arizona desert to prevent migrants from dying of thirst. This conviction was overturned on appeal in 2010, but is a clear example of how humanitarian work can place people in direct opposition to the laws of their home state (Campbell, 2012).

If faith organisations are engaged in any form of social action, it is very difficult to avoid being political (Celik, 2013). In some cases the relationship with government will be a largely harmonious one, for example where they are commissioned by government to provide formal refugee resettlement programmes (Nawyn, 2005; Eby et al, 2011). However, commissioning relationships can also be difficult, and faith organisations may fear co-optation and having to balance their independence and adherence to their principles against the receipt of much needed public funding (Jaworsky, 2010; Vanderwored, 2004). As Goldsmith et al (2006) put it, there is a risk that with public money religiosity may be muted. There may be suspicion and wariness on both sides, with fears of 'hidden agendas' on both the part of the state and the faith organisation, as Celik (2013) finds to be the case in the Netherlands.

In the UK, faith organisations have tended to be seen in public policy terms as a natural part of the delivery of a range of welfare and other services. As a result of the 'rolling back' of the state the voluntary sector is becoming much more involved in service delivery (Dinham, 2013; Simon, 2013). Government has also seen them as important in building good community relations between ethnic groups (Slade, 2010). However, assumptions about faith organisations' desire or suitability for this role are questioned (Kettell, 2013), and some argued that the state is expecting faith organisations to deliver 'more for less', relying on volunteering and other resources instead of providing adequate funding for the services it commissions or expects (Dinham, 2013).

The state can also exert other forms of power and influence over faith organisations. For example, Bano and Nair (2007) find in the context of South Asia that the state can influence how faith organisations are perceived and the degree to which they are trusted. They may also marginalise organisations by placing funding elsewhere, perhaps privileging one faith over another.

Charity law is another form of state control over faith organisations, and additionally socio-economic policies can impact on the degree of support they can raise in the form of donations, although this could be said of any third sector organisation. However in countries where faith organisations make up a high proportion of civil society, these issues are very salient. States may also seek to use faith organisations, with their large numbers of adherents, by manipulating them as a form of social control (Tomalin, 2007).

Having examined some general aspects, this paper will discuss two specific examples of action by religious people and faith organisations that brings them into conflict with the state.

Sanctuary

Sanctuary is located at the intersection of benevolence and politics (Neufert, 2014).

The provision of sanctuary, or places of refuge, by religious institutions and communities for those fleeing persecution, is a centuries old practice, and its origins and history have previously been examined by this author (Goodall, 2011; see also Stastny, 1986; Neufert, 2014; Kirmani, Khan and Palmer, 2008). Since the 1980s the practice of sanctuary provision has been an important part of the landscape of modern religiously based support for those facing deportation.

In the environment of increasingly harsh immigration regimes in many states, with

accompanying threats of deportation, the practice has in some places seen a resurgence, although it is changing in nature (Lippert, 2009). Although occasional instances of modern sanctuary practice have been recorded by other faiths, for example a Hindu temple in Canada (Lippert, 2009), almost all documented modern sanctuary provision is undertaken by Christian or Jewish communities.

Why should this be? Alongside the fact that these faiths have a long tradition of sanctuary provision for those fleeing persecution, two inter-related reasons may be identified. Firstly the rationale for sanctuary is that in general, state authorities, in the form of police and immigration officials, are usually reluctant to forcibly enter places of worship or buildings owned by religious communities in order to effect arrests or deportations. In these days of rolling news and mass media such actions can generate a great deal of negative publicity when those in sanctuary and their supporters are peaceful and non-violent, and there may often be women and children involved (Marshall, 2014).

Forcibly entering places of worship is seen as a 'step too far' which state authorities are usually, although not always, reluctant to take. Allied to this is the fact that Christian, and to an extent Jewish, faiths are majority religions in the countries currently most involved in sanctuary provision. Therefore not only are there simply more communities that may be willing to provide sanctuary, but these faiths are more linked to public institutions and the fabric of public life, and therefore to violate their places of worship through raids and arrests is likely to be seen as more unacceptable.

It is important to be clear about what the term 'sanctuary' denotes in this paper, as the term is sometimes used in the immigration context to denote other concepts. For example, in Saving Sanctuary, a report published in 2008 in the UK by the Independent Asylum Commission, the term was used as a shorthand for a fair and equitable asylum system that would provide real protection by the state. The City of Sanctuary project uses the term for the provision of safe and welcoming cities and towns, and increasingly institutions such as schools and universities, for those seeking refuge. In the USA, 'Sanctuary Cities' are those that put themselves in opposition to federal immigration laws by choosing not to enforce certain provisions related to undocumented migrants (Goodall, 2011). However, in this paper, 'sanctuary' will be used to denote the provision of a physical place of refuge by a religious community, usually for those at threat of deportation, and sometimes but not always involving secrecy.

Most writing on modern sanctuary practices has focused on the US, although modern sanctuary practice also exists in the UK, many parts of Europe and in Canada (Lippert, 2009). The US sanctuary movement of the 1980s focused on gaining political asylum for those fleeing Central America (mainly from El Salvador) and was a large transnational movement focused on a great many people fleeing from a small number of specific countries (Perla and Bibler-Coutin, 2009; Nichols, 1986). Today most incidences of sanctuary provision focus on individuals or in a very few cases small family groups originating from a range of countries being protected from deportation by small religious communities or congregations. However, what the current practices have in common with the US legacy of the 1980s is that they are intensely political in nature.

Local faith communities providing sanctuary do not always set out to do this. It is a difficult, challenging and time-consuming practice that may turn out to be fruitless, and usually sanctuary will be a response to an immediate need presented by a desperate person at the

door, rather than a well-planned aim. It is often the idea of one committed individual who may then co-opt others to help with the enterprise (Marfleet, 2010).

Providing sanctuary involves an encounter with a 'real person', often on the part of middle class people who have never thought about the issues and wouldn't normally put themselves into conflict with the law (Leddy, 2010). However, once embarked upon, a great deal of planning and organisation is required, organising shelter, food, warmth, education for children, medical attention, legal advice, and possibly if the aim is 'exposure', media coverage and negotiations with public officials (Mittermaier, 2009).

Hidden sanctuary, sanctuary as exposure, and questions of power

Most writing on sanctuary practice identifies two distinct forms of sanctuary, hidden sanctuary or sanctuary as concealment, and sanctuary as exposure. Examining the two variations of sanctuary can assist in understanding the political nature of the practice and how it impacts on relations with the state. As Leddy (2010) puts it, sanctuary is at once intensely religious and thoroughly political.

In sanctuary as concealment, the person is hidden from the immigration authorities, either in a religious building or other accommodation, in order to avoid deportation or delay legal processes, to allow for the obtaining of representation, evidence, or country of origin reports. This involves having people keep watch, and complex arrangements for provision of food and other necessities. It can be psychologically and physically draining for those being hidden, as they may be confined for weeks, months or even years (Mason and Forbes, 1994).

Sanctuary as exposure involves an element of lobbying and campaigning. The aim is to draw attention to the plight of the person, the unjustness of the impending deportation, and the need to reform laws and practices. It may involve contact with the media, and negotiating with government or immigration departments. It is seen as fulfilling a dual role of assisting the individual, and hopefully changing things for others in the future (Lippert, 2009).

Sanctuary in different contexts

In Germany, the practice of sanctuary is known as 'church asylum', and was inspired by the example of sanctuary provision in the US and in other European countries (Neufert, 2014). The first known instance of modern church asylum in Germany involved the assistance of three Palestinian families in the Church of the Holy Cross in Berlin in 1983 (Carlarne, 2013; Mason and Forbes, 1994), and in Germany both protestant and Catholic Church communities are involved in the practice. As of 2009 there were 30 to 60 incidences of sanctuary provision in Germany annually, with more than 80% successful in preventing deportation. These documented cases were 'sanctuary as exposure', but there are also said to be a number of cases of 'hidden' sanctuary in Germany (Mittermaier, 2009).

Church communities from across Europe originally came together at a conference in Groningen, Holland, in 1987 to support each other in sanctuary provision. Although little was created in terms of formal structures, in Berlin in 2010 the Charter of the New Sanctuary Movement of Europe was drawn up, which not only talks about the provision of sanctuary but the church's role in awareness raising and lobbying for policy change (New Sanctuary Movement of Europe, 2010).

The Lutheran Sisters of the Holy Cross in Uppsala, Sweden, have sheltered asylum seekers at the Alsike Kloster since 1978. Their involvement originated from a request to shelter Assyrian refugees from Turkey threatened with deportation. The order practised sanctuary as concealment for many years, but after a police raid in 1993, the practice was no longer hidden. There are many sites of hidden sanctuary provision in Sweden, though the precise number is unknown. Interestingly, there is now also a secular sanctuary movement in Sweden that combines hiding the person threatened with deportation with publicity for their case.

Catholic and protestant churches in Switzerland have a history of providing sanctuary in Berne, Zurich, Geneva and Interlaken. During the 1990s those provided with refuge were largely Albanians and Kosovars. There is also a history of sanctuary provision in Belgium and France. In Belgium many sanctuaries are hidden, although often with high profile   sponsors including church leaders. Many such sanctuaries are provided by individuals of faith as opposed to congregations. In France there were many incidences of sanctuary in churches in the early 1990s, but many were raided by police, resulting in numerous deportations, despite the intervention of church leaders (Mason and Forbes, 1994).

Church communities also provide sanctuary in Finland (Pyykkonen, 2009), although numbers are very small, with about 50 individuals being provided with sanctuary since the 1970s. Approximately one third of these resulted in the person being allowed to remain in Finland and avoid deportation. Up to 2007 all incidences of sanctuary provision were in the form of concealment. However sanctuary in Finland is now practised as exposure, and in fact faith groups are in close communication with the state in negotiating situations. This can be seen by some as the sanctuary provider becoming too close to the 'system', as those in sanctuary are selected for their likelihood of being successful. Sanctuary providers tend to choose people for sanctuary protection who are likely to engage the most public sympathy. Most are women. This puts into question the agency of the individual and the extent to which sanctuary providers end up mimicking state processes (Pyykkonen, 2009).

Finland also provides an interesting example of how the national religious environment and the relationship between the state and religious institutions can impact on sanctuary provision. Most sanctuary provision and advocacy for refugees in Finland is practised by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), which is an established 'state church' with approximately 75% of the population signed up as members. Unlike other established state churches, the ELCF has the ability to raise taxes from members, which are collected from members by the state along with income tax. This puts the church in a particular position in respect of the relationship between state, church and citizens. Arguably, the population can be seen as both 'flock' and citizenry, and these are inextricably linked. It then follows those who are not citizens are outside the flock (Pyykkonen, 2009).

As mentioned above, until 2007 all sanctuary provision in Finland was 'hidden', but following the commencement of more open practices, the church has developed a more collaborative relationship with the state. Pyykkonen argues that this has resulted in the asylum seeker being accepted into the 'flock' as long as they submit to a certain set of rules requiring them to be open and transparent, not only to the state in the form of immigration officials, but also the church congregations providing them with sanctuary (Pyykkonen, 2009).

In addition to formal sanctuary arrangements, in several European countries it is not unknown for groups of people or individuals trying to avoid deportation to take over disused churches or other buildings, sometimes with the support of church communities or charities. In

Brussels, more than 200 refugees from Afghanistan, many of them children with no right to remain in Belgium, are living in a city centre church, being supported with food and other essential support by local people (EUrActive, 2014). An Orthodox church in Russia near the border with Ukraine is being used to shelter over 100 refugees from Ukraine, mostly women and children, with parishioners in the region giving financial and other support to many more (Ortho-Christian, 2014).

In Canada sanctuary is provided in a number of cities and towns across the country by Jewish and Christian communities (Marshall, 2014; Farber, 2013; Westhead, 2012; Leddy, 2010; Rehaag, 2009). Lippert (2009) also mentions one example where sanctuary was provided by a Hindu temple. Fifty sanctuary incidents have been documented in Canada between 1983 and 2009, and they generally tend to be situated in cities which have the highest number of unsuccessful immigration determinations. The majority of examples are of sanctuary being provided for single adult males, from a range of countries (Lippert, 2009). Frequently those provided with sanctuary come from countries that have been placed on so-called 'safe lists' by the Canadian government, for example countries in Central America, but are not deemed safe by the refugees or their supporters (Farber, 2013).

Arguably, one reason for the high success rate of Canadian sanctuary in avoiding deportation, is the careful selection of individuals receiving sanctuary, from amongst the many who request it (Rehaag, 2009). People are required to prove that they have a strong asylum claim prior to going into sanctuary. Church produced guidance for potential sanctuary providers suggests that people are interviewed and that as much evidence on the case is collected as possible. Rehaag considers that some of the processes are in essence no different to what the immigration officials would do. However, Rehaag argues, sanctuary in Canada is capable of changing policy and serves to remind the state that there are places where it cannot go, and can challenge 'top down' applications of power. Canadian sanctuary providers have in recent times become involved in advocacy to reform the Canadian immigration appeal system (Lippert, 2009), and in challenging the dense bureaucracy of the Canadian immigration system, in which migrants can become enmeshed for years (Leddy, 2010).

Sanctuary provision in Canada can also be viewed as a means of countering not only harsh immigration rules, but public indifference. Leddy (2010) writes of the Canadian 'myth of innocence', through which Canada is seen to be relinquishing responsibility for those who arrive on its shores seeking refuge. It has never been a colonial power, and therefore, Leddy argues, refugees and asylum seekers are seen as the responsibility of other states. This enables the population to see less importance in how people seeking refuge are treated.

Many religious communities of different faiths are involved in protecting undocumented migrants arriving across the Mexican border into the southern United States, many of them women and children, and often unaccompanied minors. Other Christian and Jewish congregations are involved in providing sanctuary for migrants threatened with deportation in many parts of the US (see for examples Kelly, 2014; Lee and Jenkins, 2014; Wilensky, 2014; Jenkins, 2014; Wozniacki, 2014; Romanov, 2014; United Methodist Church, 2014).

Communities that may not actually provide sanctuary themselves may support those that do by collecting food or providing volunteers for the various tasks involved in sanctuary provision (Kelly, 2014; Lee and Jenkins, 2014). In Philadelphia one Jewish fellowship does not have a physical building where it worships but provides sanctuary in members' homes (Lee and Jenkins, 2014).

In many cases these sanctuary providers in the US see the provision of sanctuary as not only of direct practical assistance to the person threatened with deportation, but as a vehicle to draw attention to what they see as unjust immigration laws. This has a direct connection to the legacy of the historical US sanctuary movement of the 1980s.

It has also been noted that however desirable it might be to seek to change what are perceived as unjust immigration laws, there is a danger of those seeking refuge being manipulated as part of the political contest. Nichols (1986), looking at sanctuary provision for Central Americans in the 1980s, argued that those being helped were in danger of being used as 'ammunition' in a political conflict between governments, with some of those engaged in the sanctuary movement primarily concerned about the political and strategic outcomes. Just as in Finland and Canada, certain beneficiaries of sanctuary were strategically selected, in this case Salvadorans. Stastny (1986) concludes that forcing changes to US foreign policy was in many cases the primary aim. However, current efforts to change US policy through sanctuary could be said to differ from those of the 1980s, as they is not so closely linked with a single country of origin.

In the UK there is also a history of sanctuary provision going back to the 1980s (Srinivisan, 1994; Ranger and Ranger, 1989; Mason and Forbes, 1994; The Tablet, 2006). Numerous church congregations provide refuge in church buildings or more commonly in accommodation secured by the church, for people threatened with deportation, and often also provide other support such as obtaining and paying for legal advice (Crispin, 2005). One of the most celebrated cases was that of Tamil asylum seeker Viraj Mendez, who remained in a church in Manchester for two years, before police and immigration officials raided the church and he was deported (Srinivisan, 1994).

Sanctuary and the law

By its very nature, sanctuary puts those who engage in the practice in opposition to the law of the state in which they are situated (Campbell, 2012). Sometimes this can create an ongoing rift, but one can find several examples of where sanctuary practice has led to a very complex church/state relationship, where the parties can be both seen as in opposition and in collaboration. This can give rise to disquiet as to whether the person seeking refuge is becoming objectified, and whether the sanctuary providers mimic some of the processes of the state.

Rehaag (2009) discussed Lippert's philosophical framework through which to understand the relationship between sanctuary and immigration law. Three narratives of law are employed (see Ewick and Silbey, 1998). Firstly, sanctuary providers may see themselves as 'up against the law'. This frames sanctuary as a form of civil disobedience to protect those threatened with deportation from what are seen as unjust and oppressive laws.

In a second narrative, the law in question is seen as a far wider concept than merely the immigration laws of a particular state, but a more noble, wider ranging concept that might include 'God's law', natural justice and human rights. In this narrative, if the state violates these principles, and puts the asylum seeker at risk through deportation, the state itself is breaking the law, not the sanctuary providers. The third narrative sees the law as a sort of complex game which can be 'played' or manipulated. For example sanctuary may be used as a delaying tactic in order to give more time for legal processes to take effect, hoping for

positive results for the person provided with refuge.

Which of these narratives appear most powerful in practice? Research for this paper indicates that all three narratives are present in modern sanctuary provision. One or other may be dominant in any particular context, but all may coexist in a single situation. The second of these narratives, however, appears strongly and perhaps most often. It is frequently claimed that sanctuary is necessary because states are not abiding by their international obligations in respect of the provision of asylum (Marshall, 2014; Rehaag, 2009). This narrative links back to many of the justifications for support of refugees based on religious teachings and texts discussed earlier in this paper. National immigration laws may be defied through the provision of sanctuary because they go against God's law and the inherent dignity and humanity of all.

Australia case study

A case example that very clearly demonstrates the complex political nature of religiously based interventions to support asylum seekers, and links to the discussion of the 'second narrative' of law discussed above, is that of the current situation in Australia. It is a particularly complex and interesting case because it involves not only the relationships between the state, churches, the general public and asylum seekers themselves, but other sovereign countries that were neither the intended destination of those seeking asylum nor countries through which they passed on their way. Before outlining the current religiously based action taking place and some of the political issues involved, it is useful to provide some background to the history of the current situation.

For many years people seeking asylum have tried to reach Australia by boat. In some cases this has received intense media publicity, particularly when boats full of asylum seekers have been physically turned away. For example in 2001 more than 400 asylum seekers, mostly from Afghanistan, were rescued by a Norwegian vessel, the Tampa, when the fishing boat they were on got into trouble when attempting to reach Australia and began to sink. The Australian authorities refused entry into their territorial waters, and eventually the ship was boarded by Australian Special Forces (May, 2011; Maley, 2002). This action received widespread public support in Australia but considerable international condemnation, and accusations that Australia was not fulfilling its obligations under international law, particularly from the government of Norway (Maley, 2002).

Deaths of asylum seekers at sea in Australian territorial waters have amounted to approximately 1,000 in the last ten years (McKay, 2013). The media attention afforded to such incidents has been said by some to have given a very negative impression of Australia, and afforded the country somewhat of a reputation for punitive asylum policies (Hatton, 2011).

In 2001, following the Tampa incident, the Coalition government devised what became known as the 'Pacific Solution', whereby asylum seekers arriving by boat in Australian waters would be sent off to processing centres on the Pacific islands of Manus (Papua New Guinea) and Nauru. This arrangement was suspended in 2008 by the incoming Labor government, which later reintroduced offshore processing in 2012. In 2013, this arrangement was considerably extended so that boat arrivals would not only be processed but also resettled offshore. This meant that people who achieved refugee status would not be sent to Australia, but would have to stay in the Pacific Islands. Others who were not granted refugee status

would remain in the islands in detention, if they could not be returned to their home country. In other words, none of the asylum seekers would actually end up in Australia, whether or not they were deemed to be refugees (Warbrooke, 2014; McKay, 2013). When a new Coalition government was elected in Australia in September 2013 the Pacific Solution was retained.

The so-called 'Pacific Solution' was introduced against a background of increasingly negative public attitudes in Australia towards immigration in general, and the arrival of asylum seekers by boat in particular. According to Warbrooke (2014) the Australian government rushed through the arrangements with little or no real consultation with the Pacific islands themselves, as part of their wish to appear 'tough' on immigration prior to a general election. Warbrooke (2014) estimates that in January 2014 there were more than 2,000 asylum seekers in processing centres on the two islands, with a similar number on Christmas Island, an off-shore territory of Australia, waiting for transfer.

Alongside the 'Pacific Solution', in late 2013 the Australian government launched a campaign 'Operation Sovereign Borders' to make it clear that there would be no further processing of asylum seekers arriving by boat on the Australian mainland, and in some cases to turn back before they can enter Australian territorial waters (Campbell, 2014). According to McKay (2013) the number of asylum seekers arriving by boat was increasing despite the punitive stance of the government, but since the launch of Operation Sovereign Borders, the Australian government has claimed that fewer asylum seekers are arriving via this route than are being sent back to their country of origin (ABC News, 2014).

By processing asylum seekers in third countries, it is not at all clear that the Australian government is abiding by its international legal obligations (Warbrooke, 2014), and indeed this has come to the attention of UNHCR. Warbrooke also suggests that Australia may be imposing obligations on Papua New Guinea and Nauru that these countries did not themselves wish to take on. Warbrooke suggests that, although the Pacific islands entered into bilateral arrangements, the speed and lack of genuine consultation involved raises many questions.

The legal complexities are too detailed for the scope of this paper, but this failure to honour international obligations and human rights instruments is not unique to Australia, as noted by Flynn (2013), who detects a growing trend both of the 'normalisation' of detention regimes and the 'externalisation' of detention and processing of asylum seekers to third countries. Flynn states that, "These states are endeavouring to export to other countries their efforts to prevent undocumented migration, raising questions about their evasion of responsibility to adhere to international standards."

Research for this paper indicates that the perception that the state is not living up to its international obligations or protecting human rights is a strong driver for people of faith to take action. The Baptist Church position paper on off-shore detention, refers to the policy as 'remote control', and argues that by removing detention to other countries Australia is not only evading its responsibilities but enabling the situation to be de-personalised, so that the Australian public feel more removed from the situation and therefore less likely to care about what happens to those in detention (Belcher, 2014).

Wilson (2013b) reflects this, arguing that third country processing enables 'people to die where we cannot see them'. It enables the situation of asylum seekers to be conveniently hidden from the public, many of whom do not consider them genuine refugees, may falsely believe that the act of seeking asylum is in itself illegal, and have little or no empathy with

reasons for flight or the trauma experienced (May, 2011). Both the government and the population at large are viewed by many people of faith as evading their responsibilities. For instance, a position paper from a Baptist Church congregation states: "We believe that Australia needs to fulfil its humanitarian and moral obligations under the United Nations 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees" (Belcher, 2014).

Church leaders and congregations in Australia have been vigorously outspoken in their opposition to this regime (Brett, 2014), but the issue that has mobilised the most significant action by the church in Australia has been that of the situation of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The system dealing with them has been described as "convoluted, inequitable, grievously lacking in transparency and accountability and a system that can be cruel" (Dr Peter Catt, Foreword to Basham, 2014).

Arrangements for their care are reportedly extremely variable, interview processes often very poorly or unfairly conducted with no advocacy or support for the child, and some unaccompanied children have been sent to offshore detention centres or returned to their countries of origin without due process being completed (Basham, 2014). In late 2014 it was estimated that approximately 700 unaccompanied children were held in indefinite detention (Campbell, 2014). This above all asylum issues has prompted Australian churches to get very heavily involved, putting them in direct opposition to the state and situating them politically in a manner that has started to attract attention beyond Australia.

The response of churches to this issue has taken several forms. Firstly, there have been attempts to draw attention to the issues through the formation of a task force and the publication of several reports with recommendations for a variety of legal, practical and policy changes. A recent report produced by the Australian Churches Refugee Task Force, an ecumenical initiative of the National Council of Churches in Australia, draws attention to what are seen as some of the most damaging and inequitable policies relating to unaccompanied children (Basham, 2014). The report makes a number of policy recommendations for the improved care and support of the children. However the report is not just a set of policy recommendations, but a very strongly expressed statement of the Christian basis on which the care of asylum seekers should be based. Biblical examples are cited and the situation is drawn as a 'cruel noise that will not deafen the ears of the future', shaming Australians and damaging the country's reputation.

Other church leaders and people of faith decided on a more direct form of action on the issue. Responding to the government's 'Sovereign Borders' advertising campaign, a group of Christians and those from other faiths started their own campaign in response, 'Love Makes a Way'. Rather than forming task forces and writing reports this campaign was about civil disobedience and direct action. Participants put their demands for change to politicians directly by occupying the offices of politicians, and conducting sit downs and prayer vigils in government premises.

Between March and November 2014, 95 church leaders and clergy were arrested and charged with trespass. Twenty five of these cases reached court, but all were eventually dismissed by magistrates. The campaign also made considerable use of social media both to organise and to disseminate the message that it was wrong to detain children. The campaign combined modern means of communication which enabled spontaneous actions at many sites at one time, with messages drawn from scripture. For an example of social media use see McKenna

(2014) and note that the campaign is framed here not as political but prophetic, i.e. fulfilling a religious calling.

Alongside this overtly political action by churches and religious groups, practical front line services for asylum seekers are also being delivered by faith organisations. For example the Jesuit Refugee Service has delivered a model of 'community detention' for asylum seekers deemed to be more vulnerable, such as persons with disabilities or mental health problems, although such programmes have become more precarious with the increasingly punitive regime in place, and increasing off-shore processing (Stack et al, 2013).

Wayne Belcher's position paper for the Baptist Church embodies in one document the types of response outlined above. It is at one time a policy report, a call to action and a summary of theological reasons for supporting refugees and asylum seekers. The paper makes a number of recommendations for changes to law and policy, particularly in respect of off-shore detention and the treatment of unaccompanied child asylum seekers. It also provides quite a detailed summary of biblical passages reflecting how people of faith should view refugees. Additionally it outlines some of the direct social action being taken, including by those from his own church, and provides a framework for action (Belcher, 2014). The action outlined includes lobbying, non-violent protest, and the establishment of political groups. Belcher also advocates an attempt to follow the example of Christ and to have an individual impact. Those who are not called to direct action themselves should support those who are.

The church in Australia has not only been engaged in activities around the asylum process, but has also pressed the government to increase the number of Christian refugees fleeing the conflict in Iraq and Syria that can be received. The Bishop of Melbourne personally spoke out about this issue, stating that he believed that the government would be able to differentiate between the situation of this group and 'its usual hard line stance' (Wright, 2014).

Conclusion

This paper set out to answer three questions. It sought to examine the religious mechanisms that prompt individuals and communities from the major faith traditions to respond positively to refugees and asylum seekers. Secondly it aimed to answer the question: within the context of support for refugees and asylum seekers, how do faith organisations decide who to help? Finally the aim was to highlight how the work of faith organisations in support for refugees is by its very nature political.

The paper has established that the major world faith traditions have many commonalities with respect to hospitality for the stranger, and many have explicit exhortations to followers regarding refugees. It has also been established that there are theological justifications in several traditions for those being persecuted in a particular location to flee and seek refuge elsewhere. Indeed this is seen as strengthening the agency of asylum seekers and refugees and acting as a means of empowerment, rather than always presenting them as powerless victims.

The question of how beneficiaries are selected recurs throughout the paper, and there is disquiet about the degree to which faith organisations embrace normalised concepts of universal humanitarianism, and whether indeed these are relevant in all contexts. Linked to this is the question of whether or not being strategic is preferable to acting on individual need, and the extent to which some religious communities become inward looking. Selection of beneficiaries can also be linked to ideas of blame, being 'deserving' and personal

24

responsibility. The agency of those seeking refuge and how this can be compromised by selection processes is raised in several contexts. It is suggested that all these questions merit further examination, bearing in mind also the frequently detected Northern/Western/Christian bias, which needs addressing.

However, the major point to highlight is the clear links between religious motivation for action and the abrogation of responsibility, either real or perceived, by the state. People are moved to action when a wider concept of law – one embodying international obligations and human rights, natural law and natural justice – appears to be infringed. This is seen as a much stronger claim than state laws, and people of faith who may be naturally not inclined to break the law, can find justification in this narrative.

As seen in the discussions on Australia above, processing asylum claims in third countries may facilitate the avoidance of international responsibilities and remove the situation from public gaze. States may seek to justify their actions and avoid responsibility through other means, for example the 'myth of innocence'. It would appear that, despite the suspicions that democracy and human rights are moving further apart, these rights and the defence of them appear to be what are most likely to call people of faith to action.

Religion is a more fundamental part of many people's lives than can be readily scrutinised in purely academic terms, and this is true across the various faith traditions. In the study of the practical ways in which faith organisations provide support to the displaced, it is valuable to understand the religious basis on which this work is founded, and the fact that most of this work relies on individuals of faith and conviction to act as leaders, motivators and innovators. 'One defining characteristic of faith is belief; an obvious factor but one that is often overlooked. The starting point and values of beliefs must be respected as well as what faiths can "offer"' (Dinham et al, 2009).

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