ON WELCOMING
ASYLUM SEEKERS & REFUGEES

Jesus, Disgust Psychology and the Call to Reckless Love and Generosity
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.
‘Most, if not all, of the healing miracles … seem to have been deliberately selected by the evangelists to show Jesus healing at least one of every category of persons who, according to the purity laws of Jesus’ society, were specifically excluded and labelled unclean, or who were set at varying degrees of distance from worship in the inner temple.’

(Jeffrey John, *The Meaning in the Miracles*, p. 10)
Being unclean is ‘the normal human condition’.

(Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic*, p. 118)
‘Christ and the Centurion’, Paolo Veronese (late 16th-17th century)
‘One day a Gentile centurion living here in Capernaum came to [Jesus]. He asked him to heal his orderly. Of course you have to help Gentiles. But why this one? Everyone knows that most of these Gentile officers are homosexual. Their orderlies are their lovers. But Jesus isn’t interested in that sort of thing. He didn’t ask anything about the orderly. He healed him – and the thought didn’t occur to him that later someone might think of appealing to him in support of the view that homosexuality was permissible.’

‘Are you certain that the centurion was homosexual?’

‘Of course not, but everyone must have their suspicions. Jesus wasn’t at all bothered.’

(Theissen, *The Shadow of the Galilean*, p. 116)
'The Pharisees never once consider the fact that the contact between Jesus and the sinners might have a purifying, redemptive, and cleansing effect upon the sinners'.

(Richard Beck, *Unclean*, p. 30)
‘The Woman of Canaan’, Michael Angelo Immenraet (17th century)
‘an incident in Jesus’ life when even he was caught with his compassion down’

(Sharon Ringe, ‘A Gentile Woman’s Story’, p. 54)
‘Christ and the Canaanite Woman’, Pieter Lastman (1617)
The woman’s response is a gift to Jesus, ‘a gift that enabled his gift of healing in turn’, a gift that made it possible for ‘Jesus to respond, to heal, to become again the channel of God’s redeeming presence in that situation’.

(Sharon Ringe, ‘A Gentile Woman’s Story’, p. 56)
The Syrophoenician woman: ‘the apostolic “foremother” of all gentile Christians’.

(Elisabeth Schüessler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p. 138)
‘The more material abundance we have or seek, the more likely we are to starve from scarcity of the Spirit. But if we can let go of our anxiety about material scarcity, a great abundance of the Spirit will be opened to us.’

(Parker Palmer, The Company of Strangers, p. 113)
‘The poor and the hungry and the sick and the stranger – without and within – bring us the Christ; they bring us the opportunity to receive the gift of compassion in our lives and to be saved (‘made whole’) by sharing that gift with others. The stranger offers us the chance to come out of ourselves and thus to find ourselves. By ministering to the sick and the hungry and the imprisoned we do ourselves more good than we do them; and when we turn our back on ‘the least of these’, we turn our back on God and on our own true selves.’

(Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers*, p. 75)
‘the mad generosity Jesus recommends’

(Barbara Ehrenreich, Living with a Wild God, p. 203)
'Let the refugees in, every last one'

Given the Bible’s insistence on ‘the absolute priority of our obligation to refugees’, there is ‘no respectable Christian argument for fortress Europe’.

(Giles Fraser, The Guardian, 4 Sept. 2015)
‘A vagrant, a destitute wanderer with dusty feet, finds his way down a new road. A homeless God, lost in the night, without papers, without identification, without even a number, a frail expendable exile lies down in desolation under the sweet stars of the world and entrusts Himself to sleep.’

(Thomas Merton, ‘Hagia Sophia’, p. 71)
‘Our obligation is to see God in everyone, not merely as possibility, but as reality. So whenever we mistreat others, we are abusing our relationship with God.’

(Stephen L. Carter, Civility, p. 102)
‘The Good Samaritan’, William Etty (1838)
‘We don’t have any more food and only a little water, but if you need some, we will share what we have with you.’

(Mexican immigrants crossing the desert)
• the kingdom of God: transformation of society, integration of poor, powerless, social outcasts, disreputable

• Jesus’ healing miracles: touching the ‘untouchables’

• being unclean, ‘the normal human condition’ (Spufford) – how we meet the ‘Other’

• ‘socio-moral disgust’: groups as unclean, to be avoided, held in contempt, pushed away, expelled or destroyed – and our response to asylum seekers and refugees

• ‘positive contamination’ Jesus’ challenge not to be driven by fear and anxiety but by love, generosity and the values of God’s kingdom

• ‘reckless generosity’ (Spufford), ‘mad generosity’ (Ehrenreich) – utopian ideal or realistic target?

• our fears and our inhospitality to people coming to us for shelter

• material abundance and spiritual scarcity (Parker Palmer)

• the stranger and the gift of compassion

• ‘let the refugees in, every last one’ (Giles Fraser)

• ‘I was a stranger and you didn’t welcome me’ (Matt. 25:43)

• Thomas Merton’s ‘homeless God, lost in the night, without papers, without identification’, an illegal God?

• the Good Samaritan – and the response of those Mexican immigrants when stopped in the desert