

The Border, Brexit, and the Church: US Roman Catholic and Church of England Bishops' Teaching on Migration, 2015–2019

Victor Carmona and Robert W. Heimburger

IN EARLY 2022, UKRAINIAN REFUGEES BEGAN making their way to the borders of the United Kingdom and the United States. As they seek refuge from war, on arrival they and those providing them with assistance face the effects of migration policies that reflect the influence of right-wing populism. The June 2016 “Leave” vote for Brexit and the November 2016 election of Donald Trump left their marks, both made possible by anti-immigration sentiment among voters. Additionally, in the US, political parties are preparing for mid-term elections in November 2022. Soon after, parties in both countries will turn their attention to their 2024 national electoral contests: general elections in May for the UK and presidential elections in November for the US. Migration will likely once again be front and center. How, then, will Church of England bishops and Roman Catholic bishops in the US respond? How will their churches’ teaching address the influence of right-wing populism in the migration debate?

The need to discern what challenges the coming years might bring to Christians in both churches and countries (including immigrants and non-immigrants) is evident, and more so for those providing humanitarian assistance and working towards immigration reform. This article analyzes and assesses the teaching of US Roman Catholic and Church of England bishops regarding refugees and asylum seekers, the undocumented, and other migrants from 2015 to 2019—in the aftermath of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign with its focus on the US-Mexico border and the Brexit referendum. That four-year span is sufficient to offer an initial response to the questions we raised above.

Our analysis carries forward an ongoing discussion on each side of the Atlantic about how Christians, immigrants and non-immigrants alike, should respond to immigration law and policy in our time. In the US, Gregory L. Cuéllar furthers a “borderland hermeneutic” to resacralize the borderlands and its people in the wake of immigration and detention policies aimed at controlling and dehumanizing persons

with black and brown bodies.¹ Turning our attention to the power of a rhetoric shaped by xenophobia and racism, Matthew A. Shadle interrogates the legal/illegal frame that informs the Trump Administration's policies and demonstrates that its purpose is to distinguish "good" immigrants who assert existing racial, social, and gender hierarchies from "bad" ones who do not.² Statements by the Catholic church in the US, he concludes, have failed to recognize that this rhetorical strategy has little to do with affirming the rule of law. Additionally, Miguel De La Torre offers a collection of essays that speaks to the many concerns the Trump Administration's policies raised among Christians, including John Fife, who highlights the broad coalition of immigrant allies that organized resistance in response.³ In the UK, Anthony Reddie provides a theological critique of the understandings of what it means to be "Great Britain" that led to Brexit in *Theologising Brexit*.⁴ Susanna Snyder, Pia Joliffe, Samuel Burke, OP, Ben Ryan, Adrian Pabst, and Anna Rowlands respond to post-Brexit British immigration policies with Christian ethics from varying perspectives within the Anglican and Roman Catholic church traditions in *Fortress Britain?*⁵ Another edited volume features Anglican voices on *The Future of Brexit Britain*, with attention to questions of nationalism, race, and migration from Sam Norton, R. David Muir, Doug Gay, and Anthony Reddie.⁶ In *What Does God Think About Brexit?*

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¹ Gregory L. Cuéllar, *Resacralizing the Other at the US-Mexico Border: A Borderland Hermeneutic* (New York: Routledge, 2020), chapters 1 and 4.

² Matthew Allen Shadle, "Interrogating the Legal/Illegal Frame: Trump Administration Immigration Policy and the Christian Response," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 55, no. 1 (2020): 91–103.

³ John Fife, "Enough of Us Came Together to Carry All of Us Forward," in *Faith and Reckoning after Trump*, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 247–55.

⁴ Anthony G. Reddie, *Theologising Brexit: A Liberationist and Postcolonial Critique* (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁵ Ben Ryan, ed., *Fortress Britain? Ethical Approaches to Immigration Policy for a Post-Brexit Britain* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2018).

⁶ Jonathan Chaplin and Andrew Bradstock, eds., *The Future of Brexit Britain: Anglican Reflections on National Identity and European Solidarity* (London: SPCK, 2020).

David Nixon assesses populism and the possibility for reconciliation.⁷ Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, also wrote in response to Brexit in a book we deal with in this article.⁸ Our article furthers and bridges both discussions by focusing on teaching on migration by the bishops who oversee the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church in the US and assessing its ability to address the populism that underlies our societies' and governments' response to forced migrations at the US-Mexico border and Brexit.

Our argument proceeds in three sections. In the first, we offer brief accounts of the Trump presidential campaign and the Brexit referendum and then turn to the work of sociologists and political scientists to understand how right-wing populism shaped both outcomes. This research highlights concerns with our political systems' ability to acknowledge the human dignity of immigrants and refugees and the solidarity necessary to sustain our democracies. In the second section, we highlight cases where the Catholic and Anglican churches engaged in public communication to confront populist immigration policies, informed by Scripture to different degrees, using a wealth of genres in various settings. Books, pastoral letters, joint statements, and press releases have been used to communicate in public settings from migrant shelters at the US-Mexico border to the House of Lords in the UK Parliament. In the third and final section, we assess our churches' responses to a claim that stems from right-wing populism, the claim that migrants represent an inherent threat in a world where scarcity reigns. We conclude that our churches' responses must more clearly attend to the dual function of their teaching: not only shaping just immigration policies, but also forming communities of faith that acknowledge the human dignity of migrants and act accordingly. While the discernment of legal and policy goals is desirable, it is only part of the picture. Anglican Bishop Paul Butler and Catholic Bishop Mark Seitz embody a more integral approach that pursues those goals while first inhabiting the world of Scripture alongside migrants who "read" Scripture with their lives. By following their example, our churches may offer a more faithful response to the influence of right-wing populism on both sides of the Atlantic.

MIGRATION AND OUR SOCIAL LOCATIONS

Our social locations influence our critical analysis of our churches' teaching, part of an ongoing dialogue on the ability of moral theology to speak to and from the complex multi-layered realities of immigrant

⁷ David Nixon, *What Does God Think about Brexit? A Theological Reflection*, Palgrave Pivot (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

⁸ Justin Welby, *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018).

and minority communities, their churches, and their cross-border communities. Both of us are lay theologians with interests in Christian ethics and migration shaped by our experiences with the US and the UK immigration systems and ministry within two distinct Christian traditions.

I, Victor Carmona, was born in California and grew up in Baja California, Mexico. My experience with the US immigration system came early in life. As a child who crossed the border at least weekly, I learned of the privilege that US citizenship entails. While in graduate school in Indiana, I married a Mexican citizen. At our interview for her permanent residency visa, the officer informed us that she would be deported. Apparently, we had submitted the wrong paperwork in an incorrect sequence. We lived under the threat of deportation for nearly a year. This experience, normal for mixed-status families, cut deep.⁹ Leaving home each morning was hard, because we did not know if we would be together by the end of the day. Although I had ministered with migrants and researched migration for years when I worked with the Mexican Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, I had not experienced firsthand the fear and pain they and their loved ones live through every day of their lives. The process was confusing, expensive, and highly uncertain. While we were ultimately able to stay together, we had never *known* such powerlessness nor thirst for hope.

I, Robert Heimburger, am originally from Alabama and have lived in the UK for more than a decade. I emigrated to pursue studies and held student visas until I met and married a British citizen. While this path makes me a privileged sort of migrant, I experienced difficulties in the migration process. In a year when I finished my doctorate and made the transition to work, my family and I barely met the financial standard to renew my visa. Had we not met that standard, I would have had to leave my wife and our son to return to the United States alone. After navigating the fees, paperwork, and ceremonies of the naturalization process, I eventually became a dual US-UK citizen. During this period, I also moved churches, from Presbyterian and Episcopal in the United States and Canada to the Church of England and finally the Scottish Episcopal Church. With an Anglican chaplaincy, I ministered to students who were mostly from outside Britain, and I have served as lay preacher in parishes in England and Scotland.

⁹ Mixed-status families include citizens and non-citizens (whether they be permanent residents and/or undocumented immigrants). We had joined the nearly two million married couples whose marriages suffer under the strain of a broken US immigration system. See "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States" (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2019), www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US.

THE US-MEXICO BORDER, BREXIT, POPULISM, AND MIGRATION

Brief accounts of the Trump presidential campaign and Brexit referendum against the backdrop of the Syrian exodus are necessary to contextualize the content and influence of Roman Catholic and Anglican teaching on migration amid rising populism in the US and UK.

The 2016 Trump Campaign and Migrants

Donald Trump announced his successful campaign for the presidency on June 16, 2015. He framed his speech that day, and his presidential run, using a clear narrative: America is failing, and he will make it great again. “The US has become a dumping ground for everybody else’s problems,” Trump said. Immigrants from Mexico, the rest of Latin America, and the Middle East, were exhibit number one. He continued: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”¹⁰ While striking, Trump’s simplistic use of moral categories to explain the complexities of migration across the US-Mexico border or its relationship to other facets of American life proved to be politically effective.

The moral character of immigrants (and by extension of their US-born descendants) alongside the broader question of their impact on the country was front and center in Trump’s narrative. While members of the Republican establishment hoped he and other candidates would eventually tone down the rhetoric against immigrants, refugees, and minority communities, it only hardened once he took office.¹¹ For example, then-candidate Trump reacted to the San Bernardino mass shootings of December 2, 2015, by calling for an all-out ban on Muslim immigrants. The shooting, perpetrated by a Pakistani permanent resident and a US citizen of Pakistani descent, nicely fit his narrative. The US is at war, he (and other candidates) claimed, and the government must react accordingly.¹² Barely a week after his inauguration on January 20, 2017, President Trump signed an executive order titled

¹⁰ Washington Post Staff, “Full Text: Donald Trump Announces a Presidential Bid,” *Washington Post*, June 16, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/.

¹¹ That sense was grounded on the results of the 2012 presidential election post-mortem report by the Republican National Committee. One of the recommendations states: “When it comes to social issues, the Party must in fact and deed be inclusive and welcoming. If we are not, we will limit our ability to attract young people and others, including many women, who agree with us on some but not all issues,” “Growth & Opportunity Project” (Washington, DC: Republican National Committee, 2013), 8.

¹² James Oliphant and John Whitesides, “For Republican Presidential Candidates, War Rolls Easily off the Tongue,” *Reuters*, December 9, 2015, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-war-idUSKBN0TS16420151209.

“Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.”¹³ The order, which critics called a Muslim ban, suspended refugee admissions from Syria and other mainly Muslim countries for 120 days. With a five to four vote, the Supreme Court upheld a third version of the ban (which by then the Trump Administration had reframed as a travel ban) on June 26, 2018.¹⁴

In order to address the negative effect that, according to Trump, Mexican and other Latin American immigrants were having on the US, the Trump Administration took less than ten weeks in office to acknowledge it had enacted a policy of family separation at the US-Mexico border.¹⁵ Its aim was to deter the immigration of refugees and asylum-seekers from Central America who were crossing the border with their children. Until then, the policy under the Obama Administration had been to detain mothers with their children (under eighteen) in detention centers as their petitions played out in the US immigration system. Over a year later, after mass opposition at home and abroad, President Trump signed an executive order ending family separation on June 20, 2018.¹⁶ Six days later, a US District Judge in the Southern District of California issued a nationwide preliminary injunction ordering the government to reunite children with their parents within thirty days.¹⁷ Miriam Jordan reports that as of 2021, over 1,000 children “likely remain separated from their parents, and another 500 or more were taken from their parents who have yet to be located.”¹⁸

The Brexit Referendum, Syrian Exodus, and Migrants

In the same year that Trump was elected, British voters elected to exit the European Union. On June 23, 2016, a slight majority indicated their desire for “Brexit,” reversing decades of cooperation with European states in a move that surprised many. Prime Minister Theresa

¹³ Donald J. Trump, “Executive Order: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” January 27, 2017, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states.

¹⁴ Trump v. Hawaii, 138 U.S. 2392 (2018).

¹⁵ Justin Barajas, “How Trump’s Family Separation Policy Became What It Is Today,” *PBS NewsHour*, June 14, 2018, sec. Nation, www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/how-trumps-family-separation-policy-has-become-what-it-is-today.

¹⁶ Richard Gonzales, “Trump’s Executive Order on Family Separation: What It Does and Doesn’t Do,” *NPR*, June 20, 2018, www.npr.org/2018/06/20/622095441/trump-executive-order-on-family-separation-what-it-does-and-doesnt-do.

¹⁷ Kristina Davis and Alene Tchekmedyian, “San Diego Federal Judge Orders Separated Children Reunited with Parents within 30 Days,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 27, 2018, www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/courts/sd-me-judge-ruling-20180626-story.html.

¹⁸ Miriam Jordan, “Separated Families: A Legacy Biden Has Inherited from Trump,” *The New York Times*, February 1, 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/02/01/us/immigration-family-separations-biden.html.

May negotiated with the European Union during years of Parliamentary and public debate over Brexit, and a strong victory for “Leave” proponent Boris Johnson’s Conservative Party in the December 2019 elections ensured that Britain would leave the European Union.

An essential factor in why many British voters opted to leave the European Union was the perception of immigration as a threat. Other factors entered into the debate: the UK economy, taxes paid to the European Union, the extent to which the European Union was democratic, and the trustworthiness of politicians. The campaigns to “Leave” highlighted fears about immigration,¹⁹ like in a Vote Leave poster that announced, “Turkey (population 76 million) is joining the EU.” Below footsteps moving through an open UK passport, it added: “Vote Leave, take back control.”²⁰ This poster played on racist and anti-Muslim prejudices as it turned past discussion about Turkey joining the European Union into the false claim that Turkey *was* joining. Voting followed the lead of the campaign: intentions to vote “Leave” correlated with beliefs that immigration levels were too high.²¹

A vote for Brexit, a vote for Britain to exit the European Union, was a vote to leave the zone of free movement around the European Union. Polish and other Eastern European migrant communities in Britain had grown since being allowed free movement in 2004, with comparatively lower-income countries Romania and Bulgaria entering the free movement zone in 2014.²² An example of growing opposition to these EU migrants comes from a study describing Northern English teenagers’ discourse about “the Polish,” ascribing to them strange physical features and clothing, and speculating that as they spoke Polish, they might be planning a rape.²³ Whether voters saw immigration to the UK as an economic, linguistic, cultural, or sexual threat, fears about immigration and the desire to “take back control” resonated with many but not all of the more than 17 million people who ultimately voted to “Leave.”

¹⁹ Stuart Gietel-Basten, “Why Brexit? The Toxic Mix of Immigration and Austerity,” *Population and Development Review* 42, no. 4 (December 2016): 674, doi.org/10.1111/padr.12007.

²⁰ Simon Goodman, “‘Take Back Control of Our Borders’: The Role of Arguments about Controlling Immigration in the Brexit Debate,” *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe (Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej)* 15, no. 3 (2017): 41.

²¹ Dominic Abrams and Giovanni A. Travaglino, “Immigration, Political Trust, and Brexit: Testing an Aversion Amplification Hypothesis,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 57, no. 2 (2018): 310, 324, doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12233.

²² “Freedom of Movement in the EU,” Citizens Information, April 9, 2021, www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/moving_abroad/freedom_of_movement_within_the_eu/freedom_of_movement_in_the_eu.html.

²³ Stephen Gibson, “Constructions of ‘the Polish’ in Northern England: Findings from a Qualitative Interview Study,” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 3, no. 2 (October 1, 2015): 47–48, 50–51, 54, doi.org/10.5964/jsp.p.v3i2.414.

As a backdrop to the Trump election and the Brexit vote, civil conflict in Syria sent large numbers of Syrians along with Afghans, Iraqis, and others into Europe to apply for asylum. A photograph publicized on September 2, 2015, of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, a Syrian boy found dead on a Greek beach, formed a diptych with images of groups of migrants walking across Europe, the one image eliciting compassion and the other fear.²⁴ Widely called “the migrant crisis” or the “Syrian refugee crisis” in terms implying that migrants bring crisis rather than respond to crisis,²⁵ we prefer to call this phenomenon the “Syrian exodus.”

Anti-Immigrant Populism in the US and UK

While the Trump Administration took other ethically questionable actions to deter immigration, its early policies towards immigrants from Central America and majority-Muslim countries reflect the campaign narrative that helped Mr. Trump gain the necessary political support to be elected. In that narrative, immigrants and refugees are among the main reasons for America’s woes. Real and figurative walls are the solution. An analogous narrative seems to have taken hold of UK voters who lent their support to leave the European Union (albeit to a lesser extent). Why?

The literature in political science and sociology suggests an emerging consensus among scholars that both outcomes speak to a rise in populism depending on *and* furthering the perception of immigrants as a threat. Political scientist Graham Wilson identifies six parallels in rhetoric and strategy on both sides of the Atlantic. Three stand out. First, the Trump and “Leave” campaigns used populism, “a language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class; [who] view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic; and seek to mobilize the former against the latter.”²⁶ That language disparages expert knowledge as elitist, including—if not more so—on the topic of immigration policy. Second, both campaigns “promised to reduce immigration” in ways that conform to John B. Judis’s description of right-wing populism as “the mobilization of the people against an elite that allegedly coddles ‘an out group,’

²⁴ Helena Smith, “Shocking Images of Drowned Syrian Boy Show Tragic Plight of Refugees,” *The Guardian*, September 2, 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/shocking-image-of-drowned-syrian-boy-shows-tragic-plight-of-refugees.

²⁵ Lesley J. Pruitt, “Closed Due to ‘Flooding’? UK Media Representations of Refugees and Migrants in 2015–2016 – Creating a Crisis of Borders,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2019): 391, doi.org/10.1177/1369148119830592.

²⁶ Graham K. Wilson, “Brexit, Trump, and the Special Relationship,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2017): 544, doi.org/10.1177/1369148117713719.

or an unpopular minority.”²⁷ Both campaigns had access to research suggesting that opposition to immigration, legal and undocumented, was a powerful sentiment that could be weaponized in their favor. Finally, both campaigns invoked xenophobia and racism to underpin support from potential voters: in the case of the UK, through fear of migration from Eastern European and majority Muslim countries (including via false rumors that Turkish membership in the European Union was imminent);²⁸ in the case of the United States, through the President’s promise to build a wall that, as policy experts have indicated, will not deter immigrants from entering the country illegally or petitioning for asylum at ports of entry.

Sociologists have produced research offering helpful distinctions between right and left-wing populist movements, more so when it comes to their interaction with immigrants, refugees, and minority communities. On the one hand, this research suggests that contemporary populist movements on both ideological ends are reacting to the global financial crisis that hit non-elites particularly hard during the first decade of the millennium. As Silke Roth demonstrates, they share a critique of neoliberalism, international elites in finance and the economy, and appeals to the people to correct the current state of affairs. On the other hand, “How they conceptualize ‘the people’ varies considerably.”²⁹ Roth argues that while left-wing populist movements attempt to be inclusionary to build broad coalitions to pursue such correction, right-wing movements engage in othering to do so. Thus, “What far-right and populist movements from the right in Europe and the United States share is the fact that they are anti-feminist, anti-immigrant, homophobic movements which seek to ‘take back’ the country in the name of native (White) populations.”³⁰

From a theological perspective, these findings ground an implicit concern with the ability of the US and UK political systems and their societies to respect the human dignity of immigrants and refugees. Additionally, Judis and Roth voice an explicit concern around solidarity that deserves consideration. Judis calls attention to an impoverished underclass that he believes is threatening the “social solidarity” that sustained social democracy in the US and the UK.³¹ His thinking suggests that immigration by low-skilled workers contributed to the growth of that underclass and weakened the ability to protect labor

²⁷ Wilson, “Brexit, Trump, and the Special Relationship,” 545.

²⁸ Wilson, “Brexit, Trump, and the Special Relationship,” 546.

²⁹ Silke Roth, “Introduction: Contemporary Counter-Movements in the Age of Brexit and Trump,” *Sociological Research Online* 23, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 497, doi.org/10.1177/1360780418768828.

³⁰ Roth, “Introduction,” 498.

³¹ John Judis, “The Two Sides of Immigration Policy,” *The American Prospect*, Winter 2018, prospect.org/api/content/44d1fa7d-4b69-584b-b0f8-a41f415f6926/.

rights within both countries' political systems—another reason to “defend the labor rights of all residents in the United States, even those without papers, and to resist wholesale raids.”³² From a sociological perspective, it is evident that the solidarity required is not easily attained. As Roth reports, counter-movements like the Women's March on Washington face difficulties when “crafting solidarities across differences.”³³

THE TEACHING OF TWO CHURCHES' BISHOPS ON MIGRATION: AN ANALYSIS

During the Brexit-Trump era, the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and Mexico and the Church of England made claims about the meaning and implications of migration in light of their shared Christian faith. As such, their interventions in the public square through multiple kinds of texts along with direct and indirect lobbying are representative of their teachings on migration. Here, we have chosen to use a broad definition of teaching to accommodate how each church conceives of its teaching function in the lives of their communities of faith and wider society. We understand our churches' teaching to mean their expressions of the content of the Christian faith, as rooted in both Testaments. Their teaching has implications for each church and each country's actions toward migrants today. To facilitate our analysis, we focus below on expressions of that teaching by our communities' bishops. That narrow focus does not intend to deny the teaching function possessed by other clerics, religious, or laypersons (including through preaching), nor does it intend to diminish the vital function their praxis plays in shaping our churches' teaching on migration. Indeed, their praxis is an expression of that teaching. That is particularly the case with migrants themselves and those who serve them in shelters, parishes, and beyond.

With regard to sources, in the US, Roman Catholic bishops have written multiple texts that state, apply, and develop their church's teaching on migration. Here, we focus on texts they wrote between January 20, 2017, when the Trump Administration began, and the end of 2019, prioritizing those texts that address the Muslim ban and family separation. To narrow the focus further, we primarily analyze two kinds of documents—statements written collectively by border bishops and pastoral letters. We also do not substantially engage papal teaching on migration unless border bishops do so. We also consider, though in a secondary manner, press releases by ecclesial organizations in which a Catholic bishop is quoted.³⁴

³² Judis. “Two Sides of Immigration Policy.”

³³ Roth, “Introduction,” 501.

³⁴ Individual dioceses, state conferences of Catholic bishops, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops also offered multiple press releases on immigration

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church in the US and Mexico, Church of England bishops made no collective statements about migration in the era of Brexit, limiting the sources we can examine. Still, they made claims about the Syrian exodus and other migrations which, in a broad sense, provide teaching on migration. Their teaching was expressed in many genres, from speeches and documents presented to the Church's General Synod, to speeches in the UK Parliament's House of Lords, editorials, press releases, a book, and a statement with an ecumenical body. To present those multiple genres, we focus our analysis on the teaching of the two bishops—Paul Butler, the Bishop of Durham, and Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury—who spoke and wrote most regularly on migration between September 2, 2015, when a Syrian migrant child's body prompted the bishops to act, and the end of 2019, when British withdrawal from the European Union was assured.³⁵

The following section analyzes how our churches' teaching engages the politics of populism while remaining grounded in Scripture. To that end, we first examine how their teaching engages in public debate and then analyze how bishops provide biblical grounds for it. The two subsections are not mutually exclusive. Instead, each foregrounds an aspect of our analysis while leaving the other in the background. Each subsection focuses on the Church of England's teaching first and then moves to the Roman Catholic Church's teaching.

ENGAGING THE POLITICS OF ANTI-MIGRANT POPULISM

Church of England: The Case of Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham

The Syrian exodus moved the Church of England to action in its General Synod, the UK Parliament, and the international community. Soon after the 2015 publication of the photograph of three-year-old

during this time span. While these do not carry the same pastoral and theological weight as joint collegial statements or individual pastoral letters, they do represent a mechanism that quickly connects the church's teaching to the US immigration debate and the administration of the country's immigration system. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the California Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the USCCB are notable on this point, with active communications offices that sent out press releases with bishops' reaction to the Muslim ban, the Supreme Court's ruling upholding the third version of the ban, and family separations at the border. For a collection of reactions, see "Trump's Action Banning Refugees Brings Outcry from U.S. Church Leaders," *Catholic News Service*, January 30, 2017, cnstopstories.com/2017/01/30/trumps-action-banning-refugees-brings-outcry-from-u-s-church-leaders/.

³⁵ There appear to be no prior publications surveying Church of England teaching or action on migration besides treatments of historical periods that ended at least a century ago. For Butler, the Syrian exodus of 2015 prompted him to lead not only churches but civil society and government in resettling refugees from Syria to Britain. Welby spoke and wrote at key junctures in response to Syrian migrants and the EU referendum. Their stories stand alongside those of many other bishops and priests who have contributed voices on migration from within the Church of England during the period considered here.

Syrian migrant Alan Kurdi's dead body on the Greek island of Kos, Paul Butler, the Anglican Bishop of Durham, wrote his fellow bishops to say that something must be done. As many in the Church of England and other churches in the UK responded, Butler was among the leaders of the response, championing community sponsorship, where community groups like parish churches could work with the UK Home Office to host Syrians resettled directly from refugee camps in and around Syria.³⁶ Butler was able to promote this answer to the Syrian exodus not only by participating in charitable and cooperative efforts—first chairing the National Refugee Welcome Board and then serving as a trustee of Reset Communities and Refugees³⁷—but also through speaking and writing in his unique role between church and state as a Lord Spiritual in the House of Lords, UK Parliament's upper house.

Butler directly and indirectly responded to the politics of populism in three episodes worthy of our attention because they offer a robust example of the Anglican Church's teaching on migration amidst Brexit.³⁸ In the first episode, Butler presented a document he wrote with Philip Fletcher on "The Migration Crisis" to the Church of England's General Synod, a governing body consisting of bishops, priests, and elected laypeople.³⁹ Describing the challenges faced by those fleeing Syria and commending responses from the UK government, charities, and church actors, the document includes one obvious moral claim: "There is a vigorous tradition of British hospitality to refugees." In the debate that followed, Butler again mentions hospitality as a British value that "stands close to the heart of the Gospel."⁴⁰ His comments become more theological when, after describing the large numbers of forcibly displaced persons, he says that "God knows every one of them by name" and "each one [is] made in God's image and someone for whom Jesus Christ died." Upon cataloguing a list of places of suffering, he adds: "All of this suffering is the cry of my neighbor."⁴¹ The Synod went on to approve a motion, calling on parishes, dioceses, and local and national government to work together to resettle refugees

³⁶ "Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS): Guidance for Local Authorities and Partners" (Home Office, July 21, 2017), www.gov.uk/government/publications/syrian-vulnerable-person-resettlement-programme-fact-sheet.

³⁷ "About Reset," Reset Communities and Refugees UK, accessed March 18, 2022, resetuk.org/about/about-reset.

³⁸ Alongside these three episodes were many others, recorded and unrecorded: pastoral conversations, committee meetings, and private meetings and correspondence with the UK Home Office.

³⁹ Paul Butler and Philip Fletcher, "The Migration Crisis" (Church of England General Synod, GS 2009, November 2015), www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/gs_2009_-_the_migrant_crisis.pdf.

⁴⁰ Paul Butler, "Debate on the Migration Crisis" (Church of England General Synod, Westminster Abbey, November 25, 2015).

⁴¹ Butler, "Debate on the Migration Crisis."

while calling on the UK government to expand the numbers of refugees it would receive and establish “safe and legal routes to places of safety, including this country.” Surprisingly for a topic that captured the public imagination from September 2015 to December 2019, this was the only time the church’s governing body carried out a debate on broad questions of migration.⁴²

In the second episode, Butler led a debate in the House of Lords in response to a report for which he was partly responsible as member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees.⁴³ From 2015 to 2019, as Bishop of Durham, Butler not only served his diocese and the General Synod of the Church of England, he also sat as a governing member in the upper house of Parliament. There among twenty-six bishops and hundreds of other peers, the Bishop of Durham could debate legislation originating in the House of Commons, propose amendments, and pose spoken and written questions that a Minister from the governing party had to answer. In the House of Lords, Butler continued beyond 2019 to be active in pursuing an agenda of advocating for refugees and asylum seekers, especially children.⁴⁴

In the 2017 Lords’ debate, he began by arguing for a national refugee integration strategy and the creation of a role of Minister for Refugees. The terms in which he framed his argument reveal insight into the opportunity and paradox of being pastor and legislator at the same time. For much of the speech, he spoke as a member of a “we” among Britain’s lawmaking body. He states that when “our systems left [refugees] bereft and destitute, ... we can and should fix these structural and process issues.” Because an integration strategy for refugees will not only benefit refugees but also the “wider society,” an integration strategy is “in our own best self-interest.” As he turns to the report’s

⁴² In addition to this broad discussion, the General Synod considered two focused legal questions about migration. The first was a debate on a motion seeking a lowered fee for naturalization, *Report of Proceedings* 48, no. 1 (July 10, 2017), www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/General%20Synod%20-%20February%202017%20w.%20index.pdf. The second was a motion arguing that refugee professionals should be able to work, *Report of Proceedings* 50, no. 2 (July 7, 2019), www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/General%20Synod%20-%205%20-%209%20July%202019%20%28003%29.pdf.

⁴³ H.L. Deb. (July 19, 2017), vol. 783, cols. 1688–91, hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2017-07-19/debates/02FCEA8A-3782-431D-9C2C-DEA8D4783847/Refugees;_Refugees_Welcome?The_Experience_of_New_Refugees_in_the_UK (All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, April 2017), www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/APPG_on_Refugees_-_Refugees_Welcome_report.pdf.

⁴⁴ For example, see H.L. Deb. (January 25, 2017), vol. 778, cols. 722–24, hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-01-25/debates/B510EEDD-43EC-4FA9-8222-865249D8A3D2/HigherEducationAndResearchBill#contribution-C0B2C4B4-6D09-41ED-907E-FDAA9CEF737F.

recognition of the work of churches “welcoming refugees to our country,” he began to shift to another “we,” a different point of belonging: “We do so to join in the work of the one whom the psalmist describes as ‘a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,’ who ‘sets the lonely in families.’ We are a welcomed people who desire to welcome others.”⁴⁵

As these comments exhibit a British voice and a Christian one, they may not say what Butler believes. Instead, they play out and perform this role assumed by bishops in the House of Lords, where a Christian clergyperson sits in a governing body because he is a leader within one church communion. The comments from Butler in this 2017 debate display the tension inherent in being a bishop in the House of Lords who cares deeply about an issue of justice. In the same speech, Butler speaks as a member of a “we” who have the power to change systems of government, or with the privilege of calling publicly for reform, and at the same time as a member of a “people” welcomed and joining in the work of the God spoken of in the Psalms.

That the Bishop of Durham stands in between church and state is something Butler articulated eloquently in the third episode of this survey. He was among the UK’s representatives as a leader in refugee resettlement at the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement in Geneva, a global multilateral forum (sponsored by the UNHCR) with representatives of governments, non-governmental organizations, and refugees. There he spoke as “someone whose initial training is in fecundity” to those who are trained in “productivity.”⁴⁶ Recognizing the question his audience may have had about why they should listen to a Christian clergyperson, he questioned the assumption that “scarcity and competition is the fundamental reality.” He noted, “I keep finding evidence of another story, rumors of a possible abundance rather than scarcity.” He suggested that where productive systems “are put in the service of fecundity, of possibility, of fruitfulness, of life—it makes good policy.” Again, Butler spoke of unexpected partnerships between faith groups, schools, charities, and local authorities. While drawing on the writing of Jean Vanier, John 10, and testimonies of refugees in the Diocese of Durham, he named generosity and the willingness he saw in refugees to contribute to their new communities.⁴⁷ He spoke of refugees as individuals, not justifying that turn because

⁴⁵ H.L. Deb. (July 19, 2017), vol. 783, cols. 1688–91.

⁴⁶ Paul Butler, “Fecundity, Productivity, and Resettlement” (Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, Geneva, July 2, 2019), durhamdiocese.org/bishop-paul-speaks-at-annual-tripartite-consultation-on-resettlement-conference-in-geneva/. He attributes the pairing of “productivity” and “fecundity” to Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus Through the Gospel of John* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004), 189. This speech was given before revelations were made about Jean Vanier’s deplorable pattern of sexual abuse.

⁴⁷ See the comment about Vanier in the preceding footnote.

they have dignity, but because “each individual, each family group is a gift.” He hoped that each person might be enabled to flourish. He noted that both those who find new homes and those who welcome them report increased thankfulness for what they have and the new possibilities they discover. Resettlement must be seen, he urged, not first in terms of burdens, but through the image of “refugees as gifts.” He invited a shift of mindset in refugee resettlement from the scarce allocation of resources to a world of abundant gifts, alluding to the working of a gift-giving God.⁴⁸

As the three previous episodes suggest, the Syrian exodus amidst the Brexit debate prompted action, and teaching followed. That teaching took a wide range of forms, from speeches in the Church’s General Synod and the House of Lords to editorials, press releases, one statement, and one book relating to migrants. In the most prominent case of a church leader speaking on migrants, Butler’s comments arose out of extensive practical commitment to refugees. Church interventions on migrants tended to focus on vulnerable migrants like refugees, asylum seekers, children, and detainees rather than on those who come to the UK to join family, work, or study, with an occasional mention of EU migrants of all types. The Church of England’s House of Bishops did not issue any pastoral letters or collective statements during the September 2015 to December 2019 period, and the range of sources that did appear came from bishops speaking individually. The existing teaching tended to be brief, and only a portion of those statements contained theological or biblical content. This teaching did not provide trails or references that led to longer explanations of what Christians believe about migrants. The teaching that did come from Church of England bishops on migrants, then, was short, widely dispersed, and in the best case, flowed out of churches standing with refugees.

US Roman Catholic Bishops: The Case of the Tex-Mex Border Bishops

In the US, the Trump Administration’s decision to separate families at the US-Mexico border and force refugees and asylum-seekers to remain in Mexico moved Roman Catholic border bishops to respond. They did so through statements, lobbying efforts, and by echoing Pope Francis’s calls to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate immigrants and refugees. Catholic social teaching is evident in the bishops’ responses to populist immigration policies, which aimed to acknowledge migrants’ dignity through solidarity. In light of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn’s see, judge, act method (taken up by John XXIII in

⁴⁸ After the period considered in this article, in autumn 2020 Butler gave speeches in the House of Lords and wrote an editorial that drew more explicitly on migrants’ perspective on biblical stories. This came after his then-assistant Josh Harris read a draft of this article.

Mater et Magistra),⁴⁹ border bishops turned their gazes and ours to places along the border that US Christians may not wish to see: airports where the Muslim ban led to the detention of permanent residents and refugees; detention centers filled at first with mothers and children and then with children that officers took from their parents; ports of entry with armed troops surrounded by concertina wire as they awaited the arrival of migrant caravans; the scene of the *matanza*, the mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, where, in the words of Mark Seitz, bishop of the Roman Catholic diocese, a young man spilled Latinx blood, immigrant and not, “in sacrifice to the false god of white supremacy.”⁵⁰

Since 1986, the bishops of Roman Catholic dioceses along the Texas-Mexico border—at present five on the US side and five on the Mexican side—have met every other year. At the end of each meeting these border bishops publish a statement identifying their shared pastoral concerns. While the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) would be a closer analogue to the Church of England’s General Synod in the UK, we focus instead on this core group of US and Mexican Catholic bishops. Because of their consistency, it influences the Roman Catholic episcopate’s ministry—including its teaching—across the binational border region (where 31 million people live) and their respective national conferences of bishops.⁵¹ In that time, they have been constant witnesses of the suffering migrants experience at the border. As a case in point, their 2017 meeting took place a month after the Trump Administration announced its policy of family separation, a policy reflective of populist sentiments. Front and center was the suffering the recently announced policy was already causing. “We have seen the pain,” the bishops write, that immigrants in their dioceses are suffering because of potential family separations (a threat that ultimately became real). “We can sense the pain,” they continue, “of the separation of families, loss of employment, persecutions, dis-

⁴⁹ John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra: Encyclical on Christianity and Social Progress*, 1961, no. 236, www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html.

⁵⁰ Mark Seitz, *Night Will Be No More: Pastoral Letter to People of God in El Paso* (El Paso, TX: Diocese of El Paso, 2019), no. 1, www.hopeborder.org/nightwillbenomore-eng.

⁵¹ 31 million people lived within one hundred miles of each side of the border, and 90 million live on border states on each side of the border. See Erik Lee, Christopher E. Wilson, Francisco Lara-Valencia, Carlos A. de la Parra, Rick Van Schoik, Kristofer Patron-Soberano, Eric L. Olson, and Andrew Selee, *The State of the Border Report: A Comprehensive Analysis of the U.S.-Mexico Border*, ed. Christopher E. Wilson and Erik Lee (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, and the North American Center for Transborder Studies, 2013), www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/misc/mexico_state_of_border.pdf.

crimination, [and] expressions of racism,” all of which are leaving immigrants “empty and without hope.”⁵² Two years later, their 2019 meeting focused on the Trump Administration’s “Remain in Mexico” policy. The policy, also reflective of populist sentiments in relation to migrant caravans finding their way from Central America, forced asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for their immigration court hearings. Inspired by the parable on the judgments of nations (Matthew 25), when their meeting ended, the bishops affirmed their commitment to stay the course in providing humanitarian assistance to migrants across their dioceses (shelter, food, medicine). “We urge everyone to discover, in these brothers and sisters who are suffering, Christ in need,” they wrote, “and to give them the support they require, without assuming they are criminals, as they are sometimes perceived.”⁵³ Before concluding that the policy must be opposed because it undermines the right to seek asylum, among other legal reasons, they appeal “to governments, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, not [to] adopt policies that have the effect of increasing the suffering of the most vulnerable.”⁵⁴

As to their lobbying efforts in Congress and the public square more broadly, border bishops were remarkably consistent with their turn to the principles of human dignity and solidarity to critically reflect on the suffering they are witnessing at the border. Like most Americans, the bishops reached the conclusion that the country’s immigration system is broken.⁵⁵ What is distinctive about the border bishops’ communications was their attempt to offer accounts that are *both* legally and theologically grounded as to why the system is broken and at what cost. To that end, for the most part their press releases tended to emphasize legal or policy analyses, while Seitz’s pastoral letters (more on them in the following section) tended to offer more robust theologically informed critical reflections. Statements by the Tex-Mex bishops fell somewhere in between. Thus, for example, the bishops mostly

⁵² Tex-Mex Border Bishops and Obispos de la Frontera, *Statement of the Bishops of the Border between Texas and Northern Mexico: The Cry of Christ in the Voice of the Migrant Moves Us* (San Juan, TX: Bishop of Brownsville, 2017), nos. 6–7, www.dioceseoflaredo.org/sites/default/files/files/Immigration%20Statement%20Bishops.pdf.

⁵³ Tex-Mex Border Bishops, “Statement of the Bishops of the Border between Texas and Northern Mexico: I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me (Mt 25:35),” *Ignatian Solidarity Network*, ignatiansolidarity.net/blog/2019/03/10/remain-in-mexico-catholic-bishops/.

⁵⁴ Tex-Mex Border Bishops, “Statement of the Bishops of the Border between Texas and Northern Mexico.”

⁵⁵ For an argument that the US immigration system is *not* broken but indeed functioning as intended, please see Victor Carmona, “Mixed Status Families and Brokenness: Will our Fractured Relationships Heal?” in *Human Families: Identity, Relationships, and Responsibilities*, ed. Jacob Kohlhaas and Mary M. Doyle Roche (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 151–72.

expressed opposition to the Muslim ban through press releases that identify it as un-American, for example, because it denies due process to individuals or curtails the freedom of religion. While they also identify the ban's failure to respect the human dignity of Muslim refugees, that reasoning was usually not as central a point. That may well be because their intended purpose was to engage the country's immigration debate to shape immigration policy in targeted ways. Statements by the Tex-Mex bishops and Seitz's pastoral letters addressing family separations offer more robust accounts of human dignity, a principle which claims that all persons are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1) and should be treated accordingly, as the basis for a person's right to "find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity" and, failing that, of their right to migrate "to support themselves and their families."⁵⁶ That may well be because their intended purpose has been to shape the conversation within Catholic communities on both sides of the border, if not to form them so they may be able to acknowledge the human dignity of all alike: Muslim and Christian, citizen and immigrant, Latinx and European-American. The texts reflect a similar treatment with regard to the principle of solidarity, which John Paul II defined "not [as] a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near or far [but as] a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."⁵⁷ That principle, however, presents an added difficulty in that most readers may have an elusive understanding of what it means or how it may lead one to the *praxis* of Christian discipleship in the context of a violent immigration system that Seitz discerns to be an expression of institutionalized racism, and thus ultimately of personal and structural sin.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope: A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2003), nos. 34–35, www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope.cfm.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis: On Social Concern*, 1987, no. 38, www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html.

⁵⁸ Both letters point to the wounds, physical and psychological, past and present that immigrants and others in the border communities of the diocese of El Paso are experiencing as a result of the country's broken immigration system; see Mark Seitz, *Sorrow and Mourning Flee Away: Pastoral Letter on Migration to the People of God in the Diocese of El Paso* (El Paso, TX: Diocese of El Paso, 2017), no. 15, www.elpasodiocese.org/uploads/5/4/9/5/54952711/sorrow_and_mourning_pastoral.pdf; Seitz, *Night Will Be No More*, nos. 18, 19, 43, closing prayer.

Border bishops also lent indirect opposition to populist immigration policies by echoing Pope Francis's calls to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate immigrants and refugees. While our analysis purposefully does not include papal texts during the timeframe in question because they tend to receive the bulk of the attention, papal texts clearly support and shape the US bishops' press releases, statements, and pastoral letters. During that time, border bishops referenced seven documents and statements by the pope, but one stands out: his 2018 World Day of Peace message, which addressed migration as a global reality. In it, Francis argues that offering "asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and victims of human trafficking an opportunity to find the peace they seek requires a strategy combining four actions: welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating."⁵⁹ The message further lays out those actions and offers brief grounds from Scripture to support each (Hebrews 13:2; Psalm 146:9; Deuteronomy 10:18–19, and Ephesians 2:19, respectively). Those same actions frame the Vatican's support of the Global Compact for Migration at the United Nations, which advanced a comprehensive and integral approach to managing international population movements worldwide. They also framed the pope's call to Catholic bishops to use those same actions to frame their pastoral response to immigrants and refugees in their dioceses.⁶⁰ Echoing Francis, the Tex-Mex bishops encouraged Catholics in their 2019 statement opposing the Administration's "Remain in Mexico" policy "to join ourselves to the God of hope and life, so that he may help us to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate immigrants, as requested by Pope Francis."⁶¹

REMAINING GROUNDED IN SCRIPTURE

Church of England Bishops: The Case of Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

The Church of England's teaching on migration in the context of Brexit reflects the importance of grounding ecclesial responses in Scripture and the challenges involved in doing so in the public square. The ministry of Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, is a case in point, as his teaching demonstrates a commitment to valuing migrants while also tending to read Scripture from the perspective of someone who is settled and established.

Much of what Welby has said and written on the matter concurs with Butler's teaching: they share an emphasis on the dignity of all

⁵⁹ Francis, "Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace," January 1, 2018, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20171113_messaggio-51giornatamondiale-pace2018.html.

⁶⁰ Migrants and Refugees Section, *Towards the Global Compacts on Migrants and on Refugees 2018* (Vatican City: Holy See, 2018).

⁶¹ Tex-Mex Border Bishops, "Statement of the Bishops of the Border between Texas and Northern Mexico."

human beings, including migrants, and a message of “welcoming the stranger.” Welby differs in other respects. As for genre, he too has written press releases, spoken to the General Synod and in the House of Lords. His speaking and writing have special prominence because he is the Church of England’s leading member of clergy as Primate of England and Metropolitan.⁶² Welby gave a speech in the House of Lords just after the EU referendum vote responding to its implications, and many other Lords responded to this speech, indicating his special role in speaking to Britain in moments of crisis.⁶³ In response to Brexit, he published a book entitled *Reimagining Britain*, expressing views he said were his own rather than the official position of the Church of England.⁶⁴ While Butler tended to focus on refugees, Welby said more in the wake of Brexit about the connection of immigration to integration. His comments that fears of migrants were not necessarily racist drew note in the tabloid press,⁶⁵ and he has said that the response should be to recognize those fears, transferring more resources to communities experiencing a high level of immigration.⁶⁶ Alongside this advice to government, he has called on churches to be involved with integration, mentioning Near Neighbours as a Church of England effort linking local communities.⁶⁷ Connected to a commitment he made during his archiepiscopate to reconciliation, Welby sometimes addressed Brexit as a division internal to Britain and mentioned the migrant residents of Britain “who feel fearful and rejected

⁶² Martin Davie, *A Guide to the Church of England* (London: Mowbray, 2008), 9.

⁶³ H.L. Deb. (5 July 2016), vol. 773, cols. 1859–61, hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2016-07-05/debates/D80BBB95-5A60-4084-B3DF-F83312E031C2/OutcomeOfTheEuropeanUnionReferendum#contribution-44BD09F4-F5BD-4D11-BB04-B817DADBD89A. For other Lords’ comments, see Justin Welby, “Archbishop of Canterbury on the Future for the United Kingdom after the EU Referendum,” *The Church of England in Parliament*, July 5, 2016, churchinparliament.org/2016/07/05/archbishop-of-canterbury-on-the-future-for-the-united-kingdom-after-the-eu-referendum/.

⁶⁴ Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, x.

⁶⁵ James Slack, “It’s NOT Racist to Fear Migration, Says the Archbishop of Canterbury: Justin Welby Believes It Is ‘Outrageous’ to Dismiss Public’s Genuine Concerns about Housing, Jobs, and the NHS,” *Daily Mail*, March 10, 2016, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3486397/It-s-fine-fear-migrant-influx-says-Archbishop-Canterbury-Justin-Welby-believes-absolutely-outrageous-people-voice-concerns-condemned-racist.html.

⁶⁶ Justin Welby to the Home Affairs Committee, Oral Evidence, the Work of the Immigration Directorates (Q1 2016), H.C. 151 (June 7, 2016), data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/the-work-of-the-immigration-directorates-q1-2016/oral/34208.html; Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, 189, 206.

⁶⁷ Justin Welby, “Debate on a Motion on the EU Referendum,” Church of England General Synod, *Report of Proceedings* 47, no. 2 (July 8, 2016), www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/July%202016%20Report%20of%20Proceedings%20w.index_.pdf.

... with ... good reason” as well as the uncertainties of British “expatriates” in the European Union.⁶⁸ Besides integration, Welby spoke more often than Butler in terms of concepts or middle axioms that those of many persuasions might share, some of these drawn from Catholic social teaching, terms like justice, peace,⁶⁹ relationship,⁷⁰ common good, generosity, hospitality, gratuity, and solidarity,⁷¹ though he applied “solidarity” to inequalities internal to Britain rather than to standing with migrants.⁷²

In the speeches and writing considered here, Welby’s handling of Scripture in relation to migrants draws on many of Butler’s themes as well as a few others. After the Syrian exodus, Welby wrote that we should love strangers as ourselves, from the legal texts of Leviticus 19:34,⁷³ and said that “Jesus was a refugee,” with reference to the Holy Family’s flight to Egypt in Matthew 2:13–15.⁷⁴ His book includes two lengthier considerations of Scripture in relation to migration, interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) in relation to British foreign policy and the Book of Ruth in relation to immigration and integration. From the parable, the book makes the suggestive claim that the neighbor is not only someone nearby or within the in-group but includes the enemy and reaches across boundaries, even in today’s interconnected world.⁷⁵ It argues for increasing Britain’s intake of refugees, sending development aid to prevent migration push factors, and using hard power and soft power together.⁷⁶ And it tells the moving story of Ruth as a love story between members of two enemy groups.

Yet in Welby’s book, the interpretation of Luke and Ruth does not bring to the fore the strong role that foreigners play as bearers of divine mercy, love, and joy. The section on the Parable of the Good Samari-

⁶⁸ Welby, “Debate on a Motion on the E.U. Referendum.” See also H.L. Deb. (5 July 2016), vol. 773, col. 1860.

⁶⁹ Justin Welby, “Archbishop of Canterbury on the Refugee Crisis,” Church of England, September 3, 2015, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/latest-news/news-archive-2015/archbishop-canterbury-refugee-crisis.

⁷⁰ Welby to the Home Affairs Committee, H.C. 151 (June 7, 2016).

⁷¹ H.L. Deb. (5 July 2016), vol. 773, cols. 1859–61.

⁷² For the influence of Catholic Social Teaching on Welby, see his *Reimagining Britain*, 286. For an Anglican account of using social principles (following William Temple) and middle axioms (following Ronald Preston) that stand between church and society, see Alan M. Suggate, “The Temple Tradition,” in *Anglican Social Theology: Renewing the Vision Today*, ed. Malcolm Brown (London: Church House, 2014).

⁷³ Welby, “On the Refugee Crisis.”

⁷⁴ Tom Pugh, “Jesus Was a Refugee, Says Archbishop of Canterbury in New Year Message,” *The Independent*, January 1, 2016, www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/jesus-was-a-refugee-says-archbishop-of-canterbury-in-new-year-message-a6792706.html.

⁷⁵ Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, 187.

⁷⁶ Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, 176, 183, 190.

tan fails to point out that the person who follows one of the great commandments and loves his neighbor as himself is the Samaritan, the stranger that the parable's hearers would have viewed with suspicion as a half-breed heretic and outsider.⁷⁷ The treatment of the Book of Ruth praises Boaz, the settled person in the story, for risking a marriage to Ruth, obeying God, and showing courage. The book does not appear to praise Ruth who courageously moves to an enemy country, risks her reputation in approaching Boaz at night, and is the only one in the story said to display *hesed*, the faithful love that characterizes God in the Hebrew Scriptures.⁷⁸ This exploration of immigration and integration from *Reimagining Britain* does not read the stories from a migrant's perspective, missing the spotlight each story places on a migrant. It misses the Samaritan as bringer of God's mercy and Ruth the Moabite as bringer of God's love and joy.

As for whether Welby's writing and speaking on migrants counters the worst of populism with a Christian vision of what a people is, his teaching continues Butler's pattern of speaking of the dignity of migrants and the value of welcoming them. Still, his statements from September 2015 to December 2019 do not seem to say much to support fellow feeling for migrants or oppose racism. As for a vision of the people that might counter populism, Welby's teaching exhibits more of a singular picture of being both British and part of the church—and not only British, but a member of a ruling class in Britain. There are moments when his book hints at a disunity between Britain and the church, like when he says that the role of the church is to bear witness to Jesus Christ, which is not something he expects of the UK. He sees the church's witness as happening "in the political system" so that it "live[s] as the people of God in such a way that society is both preserved and illuminated."⁷⁹

Most of the time, however, Welby's statements hold Britain and the church close together. When he speaks in the first-person plural, "we" tend to be the British people and British rulers, like when he moves from interpreting the Parable of the Good Samaritan directly to the claim, "Applying our values to foreign policy has to take account of our interests."⁸⁰ He gives reasons for holding Britain and the church closely together, for example, when he writes: "Because of the Christian foundations of our society in Britain, it draws frequently on more or less well-known traditions and stories in the Bible."⁸¹ The reasons

⁷⁷ Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, 178–81, 186–87; see Robert W. Heimbürger, *God and the Illegal Alien: United States Immigration Law and a Theology of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 192–93.

⁷⁸ Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, 200–05; Susanna Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration, and Church* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 180–83, 191.

⁷⁹ Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, 21.

⁸⁰ Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, 187–88.

⁸¹ Welby, *Reimagining Britain*, 4.

he gave to a House of Commons committee that Britain should take in more refugees are similar: “Are there really good reasons why the overwhelming claims of our historic culture of Christian compassion, which is deeply embedded for believers and non-believers and goes back centuries, and has received refugees for centuries, should be overruled?”⁸² Speaking to a church gathering, the General Synod, he also speaks with what sounds like one “we” who both takes refuge in God and has a foreign policy.⁸³ Welby does not speak as a strange voice with strange stories, or as a migrant voice with migrant stories, but as a historic voice speaking from Britain’s foundations. He speaks as someone embodying Britain and church, British and church leadership. With that voice he speaks for a different vision of a welcoming British people, but it is not clear that he speaks for a Christian people that includes migrants.

In terms of the interaction of Anglican bishops’ teaching on migrants with Scripture, then, the most frequent themes are that migrants are human beings with dignity, a claim sometimes connected with their being made in the image of God, and that churches or the British nation should welcome the stranger. In two cases, biblical themes are expounded at more length, in a speech on John 10 and refugees as gifts, and in a book drawing on Ruth and the Parable of the Good Samaritan to praise love for neighbors that crosses ethnic and national boundaries. What that book misses in these passages, as noted earlier, is the way they feature foreigners as agents of divine grace, focusing instead on praising charity among settled persons. Other biblical themes rarely appear in Church of England teaching if at all; only the lay, non-British voice of Meg Warner in a General Synod debate talks about migration as central to the church’s foundation stories in Abraham’s call and the Exodus.⁸⁴ Butler touches on church identity as a “welcomed people” in one House of Lords speech, but other ways of framing the church as a community of outsiders, whether Gentiles welcomed into Israel or the diaspora sent out in mission, do not appear in the dozens of documents. Beyond biblical themes, the bishops follow the tradition of William Temple in appealing to concepts shared by church and wider society, concepts like hospitality and integration. Unlike their Catholic counterparts, the Anglican bishops do not seem to appeal to solidarity. Instead of implying a posture of standing with

⁸² Welby to the Home Affairs Committee, H.C. 151 (June 7, 2016).

⁸³ Welby, “Debate on a Motion on the E.U. Referendum.”

⁸⁴ “Debate on the Migration Crisis,” Church of England General Synod, *Report of Proceedings* 46, no. 3 (25 November 2016), www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/RoP%20November%202015%20%28final%20version%20with%20index%29.pdf.

immigrants and their struggles, a conflictive stance, the Anglican emphasis on welcome and integrating implies a posture of seeking harmony within society.

US Roman Catholic Bishops: The Case of Mark Seitz, Bishop of El Paso

In the US, Roman Catholic bishops' responses to Trump Administration actions also reflected the importance of grounding ecclesial responses in Scripture along with the challenges of doing so beyond the walls of the church. In Roman Catholicism, a bishop has the right to write pastoral letters to his diocese. As William Clark explains, "The bishop's authority to teach in this way is secured by his position as the chief pastor of his diocese."⁸⁵ Mark Seitz, Roman Catholic bishop of the diocese of El Paso, wrote two pastoral letters during the Trump Administration that address migration. The first, *Sorrow and Mourning Flee Away*, from July 2017, sets out to name, confront, and transform the reality of migration in his diocese—particularly in terms of the suffering that immigrant detentions and family separation are causing his people.⁸⁶ The available evidence suggests that no other bishop had dedicated a pastoral letter to the topic of migration since 2003. Seitz wrote the second one, *Night Will Be No More*, in the aftermath of the shooting—the *matanza*—of August 3, 2019, that left 22 people dead in El Paso.⁸⁷ It addresses the shooting as a consequence of the white privilege and racism his people suffer under, especially the Latinx community and immigrants.

Generally, the statements of Catholic border bishops reflect two methodological characteristics of Catholic social teaching on migration: (1) a reliance on general principles to discern what doing the good entails, particularly in terms of their stance on specific immigration policies; (2) a necessary eschatological reservation as they do so. The last point is key because it allows them to address a temptation that may be influencing US Christians, including Catholic officials and policy makers. Echoing the insights of Butler, Seitz observes that fear and the desire for complete security may be shaping people's thinking in unrealistic and spiritually distorted ways. Seitz writes: "We will never build a utopia in this broken world of ours. Guarding mere passing possessions is not our goal. We serve a God of abundance who provides for the needs of those who serve Him with charity and generosity. We trust that God did not create a world without room

⁸⁵ William A. Clark, "Pastoral Letter," in *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. Orlando O. Espín and James B. Nickoloff (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 1009.

⁸⁶ Seitz, *Sorrow and Mourning Flee Away*.

⁸⁷ Seitz, *Night Will Be No More*.

for all at the banquet of life.”⁸⁸ Immigration reform, the texts seem to suggest, will only be possible when that kind of utopic thinking—grounded in fear and scarcity rather than abundance and hope—gives way.

While the previous characteristics shed light on how Catholic teaching addresses populist immigration policies at the border, they also point to its superficial engagement with Scripture to substantiate theological-ethical claims regarding such policies. Others have critically analyzed the contours of Catholic social teaching’s engagement with the Bible.⁸⁹ In the case of the texts in question, their limited use of Scripture might reflect their purpose. For instance, what *would* proper use of the Bible look like in a press release addressing a specific immigration policy? As for the statements by the Tex-Mex bishops, for the most part they simply referenced Jesus’s parable of the judgment of nations (Matthew 25:31–46). Their 2019 statement, reflecting the fact that the struggle for immigration reform is now over a quarter of a century old, also closes prayerfully with Galatians 6:9 (“Let us not grow tired of doing good”). While the prayerful use of the text might be sufficient, is its use without any further attention to the passage or its context (historical, literary, etc.) appropriate?

Pastoral letters tend to offer bishops more room to maneuver; to read Scripture and, as Gustavo Gutiérrez writes, allow ourselves (and our ecclesial and political communities) to be read by Scripture.⁹⁰ Seitz’s pastoral letters, for example, engage Scripture with care and consistency. For instance, he frames *Sorrow and Mourning Flee Away* as a reflection on his border community’s experience with immigration in light of Isaiah 35:7, 10 (“The burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water. . . . And the ransomed of the Lord shall enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy. They meet with joy and gladness . . . sorrow and mourning flee away”). As Michael Sean Winters observed, the passage “reflects the view from that of the migrant . . . entering Zion, a once distant and harsh land made fertile and welcoming. It is the view of the migrant arriving at her destiny, under the shadow of God’s protection.”⁹¹ The passage al-

⁸⁸ Seitz, *Sorrow and Mourning Flee Away*, 14.

⁸⁹ See, for instance, “The Bible and Catholic Social Teaching: Will This Engagement Lead to Marriage?” *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, 2nd ed., ed. Kenneth Himes, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Charles E. Curran, David Hollenbach, and Thomas Shannon (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 9–40.

⁹⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Beber en su Propio Pozo: en el Itinerario Espiritual de un Pueblo*, 9th ed. (Lima: CEP, 2011), 58.

⁹¹ Michael Sean Winters, “Bishop Seitz’s Remarkable Pastoral Letter,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 19, 2017, www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/bp-seitzs-remarkable-pastoral-letter.

lows the bishop to acknowledge “the pain and the hardships,” as Winters observes, “but doesn’t give them the last word.” Even so, the letter does not make explicit that original context or explain why it speaks so powerfully to our own. One may argue that it is a matter of writing style, an author’s prerogative to let a pastoral letter unfold itself slowly, in time; or that a practice is developing in the community to interpret the pastoral letter accordingly. Seitz’s pastoral letter on racism engages Revelation 22:5 (“Night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun, for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign forever and ever”) to similar effect. Perhaps the texts’ limited use of Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are an implicit acknowledgment of the ambivalent ways and complex perspectives in which they engage the experiences of people on the move—more so in light of the cultural and historical distances that span the worlds of the Bible and ours.⁹² And yet, such grappling should be at the heart of texts such as these, if not at least somehow evident in them.

THE TEACHING OF TWO CHURCHES’ BISHOPS ON MIGRATION: AN ASSESSMENT

In this paper, we have outlined how populism in the US and UK depends on and furthers the perception of immigrants as a threat, particularly in the case of right-wing populism. Then-candidate Trump and the “Leave” campaign leveraged that perception successfully by invoking racism and xenophobia, encouraging the notion among voters that elites favor immigrants and refugees to their detriment. We analyzed how Roman Catholic bishops in the US and bishops in the Church of England marshaled their churches’ teaching on migration to inform their communion’s response and their government’s actions after the election and referendum. We turn now to assess how the teaching on migration by bishops from both churches reckons with the influence of populism during the Brexit-Trump era.

First, how have the two churches responded to the claim that migrants represent a threat? Here, the US Roman Catholic bishops are a step ahead of their Church of England counterparts, working in groups with bishops across the border in Mexico and writing letters, especially in the case of Bishop Mark Seitz. The Church of England bishops’ interventions on migration tend to be short, occasional, and written individually. Given the way that xenophobic discourse harms those on the margins of society and twists the imaginations of our countries, we propose that Church of England bishops can learn from

⁹² For penetrating scholarship that illustrates the point, see Gilberto A. Ruiz, “‘Out of Egypt I Called My Son’: Migration as a Male Activity in the New Testament Gospels,” *Latinxs, the Bible, and Migration*, ed. Efraim Agosto and Jacqueline M. Hidalgo (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 89–108.

US Catholic bishops by devoting more attention to writing and speaking about migration. Alongside commitment to practical work alongside migrants, the Church of England bishops can gather to study, discuss, and write on the issue, as the Mission and Public Affairs division of the Church plans to do. Given the limits of their time and expertise, the bishops can draw on or foreground the works of laypeople and priests on theology and migration. Following the example of the Tex-Mex and Alta-Baja bishops who meet across the US-Mexico border to examine issues together, the bishops of the Church of England can take up the theme of migration in gatherings with other churches, whether Anglican communions beyond England or ecumenical discussions. Finally, following the example of Mark Seitz, Church of England bishops can write pastoral letters on issues of migration, as they have done on political life and creation.⁹³

Second, how are the churches' bishops reckoning with Scripture in responding to the fear of migrants? In the sources analyzed, we find that some US Catholic and English Anglican bishops tend to advance their teaching about migration by appealing to national values or interests, whether American or British. Many of their interventions focus on making changes in law and policy. Those interventions may be motivated by worship and faith nourished by the Scriptures, but sometimes that motivation is not clear in the writings and speeches. Exceptions come in two cases where bishops draw upon the deep wells of Scripture. Roman Catholic Bishop Mark Seitz's pastoral letter, *Sorrow and Mourning Flee Away*, interprets a border community's experience within the world of Isaiah 35 so that the migrant's experience is set within the experience of crossing burning sands to reach Zion, singing and full of joy. By resting in the world of Scripture, Seitz enables the framing of church and government actions toward migrants in a manner that acknowledges God as a God of abundance. This insight aligns remarkably well with a second case where Church of England Bishop Paul Butler speaks from John 10 that abundance is a deeper reality than scarcity. Both bishops zero in on how the belief that this is a world of scarcity motivates fear of migrants and shapes government policies. The insight that this is a world of abundance offers the clearest evidence of the distinct way in which our churches' teaching may reckon with the influence of populism on immigration policy.

⁹³ The House of Bishops issued a letter before the period considered in this article: "Who Is My Neighbour? A Letter from the House of Bishops to the People and Parishes of the Church of England for the General Election 2015," February 2015, www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/whoismyneighbour-pages.pdf. See also "Anglican Primates Respond to Archbishop of Canterbury's Request on Letters for Creation," *Anglican Communion News Service*, September 18, 2018, www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/09/anglican-primates-respond-to-archbishop-of-canterburys-request-on-letters-for-creation.aspx.

Bishops Seitz and Butler are able to perceive that abundance runs deeper than scarcity because their vision firmly rests in the universe of Scripture or, as Hans Ulrich describes it, finds its resting place in God's story.⁹⁴ They are able to speak about a God who gives and refugees *as* gifts when they allow themselves to be read by Scripture, in Gustavo Gutiérrez's words.⁹⁵ They speak in different contexts; Seitz writes to his diocese and quotes Scripture more, while Butler speaks to refugee resettlement workers and recognizes their doubts as to whether they can learn something from a bishop. Butler gently expresses what he, like Seitz, has gained by listening—listening to Scripture where they hear God's Word, and listening to stories from refugees, asylum seekers, and their neighbors. Butler passes on what he has heard, much like Seitz: a reality of gift-giving and fecundity runs alongside the apparent realities of scarcity and productivity.

A more complex case comes from Welby's book *Reimagining Britain*. The work interacts with Scripture at some length, examining Luke and Ruth and expecting to receive new insights about immigration and integration, and for that it ought to be commended. But the book's insights draw attention to the settled persons in the story rather than persons on the move: it praises settled Boaz more than the brave migrant Ruth, and does not seem to point out that the one who reaches across boundaries to become a neighbor is not the settled person but the Samaritan, the hated foreigner. While the book goes part of the way, we hope that texts about migration would dwell more in the biblical stories. As the bishops teach and preach from the Bible, can they read the Bible more like foreigners and outsiders and not mostly as settled citizens? If bishops can read Scripture alongside migrants as Seitz and Butler sometimes do, their teaching might do better at inviting hearers into life as an exodus people, an exiled people, and a dispersed church—a redeemed people of God.

Third, our analysis suggests that bishops' statements necessarily have a dual function: shaping more just immigration policies and forming faith communities that acknowledge migrants' human dignity and act accordingly. However, concern for the former appears to outweigh attention to the latter when both must go hand in hand. It may seem that the most efficient approach to protecting vulnerable migrants is to appeal to national interests and values, whether American or British, in the public square, but that move overidentifies the hierarchy (if not the churches themselves) with Pharaoh rather than Israelite migrant slaves, with Nebuchadnezzar rather than the exiles in Kings, with the chief priests and scribes rather than the persecuted diaspora in Acts. If bishops' statements in both churches could more

⁹⁴ Hans G. Ulrich, *Transfigured Not Conformed: Christian Ethics in a Hermeneutic Key*, ed. Brian Brock (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 29–50.

⁹⁵ Gutiérrez, *Beber en su Propio Pozo*, 58.

fully dwell in the narratives of Scripture, they would be better equipped to address the fear feeding into extremely restrictive immigration policies and laws. They will also be better able to form faith communities that fully acknowledge migrants and refugees as people with whom God journeys. If, as with Seitz and Butler's statements, they can inhabit the story of God's loving embrace of a damaged world first, then the surplus from that story will spill over into questions of civil politics. They might approach speaking in Parliament or writing to governors and Congresspeople more like Esther who speaks to protect God's exiled people in Persia. They might call on their faith communities to learn from the best examples among them to say, "Refugees and the undocumented are our people; we as church are a migrant people who stand alongside these multiply marginalized migrants." From there a truer solidarity will arise. Such an approach might seem weak; it might seem less politically expedient or productive. Yet, it will be more consistent with the bishops' prophetic calling and, in Butler's words, more fecund.

In conclusion, the influence of right-wing populism in the US and UK migration debates will continue (if not deepen). Catholic and Anglican churches in the US and UK, respectively, have spoken in the public square to confront populist immigration policies in light of Scripture directly and indirectly. In the future, bishops' texts and statements can respond better to populism, xenophobia, and racism by attending to migrants as they meet, speak, and write. Anglican Bishop Butler and Catholic Bishop Seitz embody that approach in distinct ways. Our bishops' teaching can respond better, then, not by foregrounding or starting with legal and policy goals but by inhabiting the world of Scripture alongside migrants who "read Scripture" with their lives and challenge non-migrants to be read by it. In this way, the vision of the reign of God can bring new life to tired discourses and festering wounds, being truer still to Christ's subversive hope. **M**

Victor Carmona is an Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego. Recent pieces include "Amar en medio del conflicto: la teología de la liberación ante la migración" in *Memoria, presencia y futuro: A los 50 años del libro Teología de la liberación* (CEP, 2021) and "Mixed Status Families and Brokenness: Will our Fractured Relationships Heal?" in *Human Families: Identity, Relationships, and Responsibilities* (Orbis Books, 2021). His current writing brings insights from the discipline of spirituality to migration ethics.

Robert W. Heimburger is a Research Fellow in Theological Ethics at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. He is author of *God and the "Illegal Alien": United States Immigration Law and a Theology of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). With Fe y Desplazamiento, the Faith and Displacement Project at the Seminario Bíblico de Colombia (FUSBC), he co-

authored curricula for internally displaced persons and published on forgiveness, conflict, and the parable of the unforgiving debtor. His current writing asks what the Book of Acts has to say about ethics and politics today.