



**SEEKING REFUGE:
FAITH-BASED APPROACHES
TO FORCED MIGRATION**

Poverty and Peacemaking II
March 3–4, 2017 at Princeton University

How Do We Operationalize Our Faith?

Alexander Goldberg, Carob Tree Project (Moderator)
Bram Bailey, Salvation Army World Service
Mitzi Schroeder, Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Imam Sohaib Sultan, Princeton University Office of Religious Life
Adjoa Mante, Princeton University (Student Rapporteur)

Moderator Alexander Goldberg, chief executive of the Carob Tree Project, opened the roundtable by introducing himself and his experiences with faith-based approaches to migration. Goldberg described his background, which includes advising former administrations in the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as founding CCJO Rene Cassin, human rights group in the UK with NGO status at the UN in Geneva. Goldberg highlighted the challenges faced by EU citizens, asylum seekers, and trafficked individuals in light of “Post-Brexit” and “Post-Trump” political climates. In contrast, Goldberg argued that the Jewish faith teaches the foundational importance of three pillars: “the Torah (the moral code and law we follow), prayer (service to G-d) and acts of loving kindness.” In light of this faith background, Goldberg contended faith groups must operationalize our faith to achieve justice. He noted the perennial nature of disdain towards migrants (e.g. surveys carried by CRE / British Government showing that some former migrants distanced themselves from other waves of migration, claiming their migration was different). Finally, he opened the discussion to key questions including: how do we get communities to engage in humanitarian services or delivering services to refugees? How do we operationalize our faith in the current political climate?

Mitzi Schroeder of Jesuit Refugee Service/USA (JRS) discussed the view of refugees in the Jesuit faith tradition and how this faith tradition informs the actions of JRS. Schroeder asserted that Jesuit teachings state that we should live as men and women for others; additionally one ought to see the face of God in every human being. In light of the importance of service in this faith tradition, Schroeder maintained that the JRS targets their efforts towards people and places not served by others. Furthermore, Schroeder emphasized the critical Jesuit principle of accompaniment, which is rooted in the Jesuit tradition as “companions of Jesus”. Therefore, Schroeder stated that the JRS as an organization strives to be companions of the people whom Jesus preferred – the lowly and neglected. Schroeder additionally discussed the Jesuit principle of discernment; people are encouraged to observe all circumstances and make decisions in terms of their aspirations moving forward. Given the Jesuit tradition of solidarity and accompaniment, Schroeder argued that the Jesuit faith has a strong basis in refugee work.

Schroeder continued with a description of the advocacy and strategies of JRS. She described how in her position as the US policy director for JRS, she engages in organizational work which is “the



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modern manifestation of a centuries old commitment to support for refugees and suffering populations”. Schroeder asserted that the process of advocacy at JRS grows out of fieldwork (e.g. difficulties lived and experienced by refugees); thus the process of advocacy includes bringing these challenges to policy makers and suggesting concrete changes moving forward to develop better results.

Bram Bailey of the Salvation Army World Service described the historical background of the Salvation Army to inform a discussion of how the modern Salvation Army World Service operationalizes faith to serve migrant communities. As Bailey articulated, the Salvation Army (SA) developed during the industrial revolution and came out of Methodist tradition. Bailey described how the founder was driven by faith to work with the destitute; he questioned how people could consider larger questions of faith in the face of hunger and poverty. In Bailey’s work with the modern Salvation Army, the organization continues to orient its philosophy around faith, firmly believing that “serving others is...[a] mandate of faith” and “service to others is....the outgrowth of one’s relationship with God.”

Bailey continued with a discussion of the practical ways in which the Salvation Army acts to operationalize faith through service. Bailey broadly described a range of Salvation Army projects related to education, health, income generation, anti-trafficking and disaster response at the community level. Additionally, Bailey discussed the international work of the Salvation Army World Service, which addresses the needs of migrant communities in various countries. Bailey celebrated the rich relationships within the community that have developed out of engagement to support refugees. However, Bailey described a current challenge of the Salvation Army: addressing the tension between the faith-based scriptural goals of the organization and community engagement.

Imam Sohaib Sultan of Princeton University’s Office of Religious Life contended that the Quran predicts and prescribes reactions to the global chaos and crises faced by mankind. Pointing to a passage in the Quran where the angels express fear of the violence and destruction that the human population might bring, Sultan claimed that the angels’ fear ties into the modern global crises faced by the human race. Sultan further contended that throughout the scriptures, God puts forward a response to the fears of the angels; God says that “those who follow His guidance will...have a distinct reality.” Sultan stated that in the Islamic tradition, faith and good actions are required to follow God’s guidance. Specifically, Sultan noted that the rules within the Quran are tied to 6 broader considerations including the protection of religion, life, education, and human dignity.

Turning to a discussion of how to operationalize the Islamic faith, Sultan mentioned the international work of Islamic organizations like Helping Hand and Islamic Relief. These organizations engage in service work through the lens of the six considerations, allowing people economic independence through faith-contextualized actions. Sultan noted that even smiling is



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seen as charity in the Islamic tradition; in light of this the organization SMILE has set up soup kitchens in New Jersey and is working with refugee populations to ensure that basic needs are met. Lastly, Sultan emphasized the importance of defending the dignity of refugees and migrants. Sultan argued that divisive political rhetoric has projected the fears and selfishness of human beings onto forced migrants (e.g. rhetoric of migrants “taking jobs” and “bringing violence”). Given this context, Sultan claimed the importance of protecting the reputation of refugees is crucial in the operationalization of faith. However, he argued that lifting up the narratives of the exceptional is not enough; in his view, figures in need e.g. “the taxi drivers or the single mom forced to beg outside of a mosque” are worthy of the same dignity as the successfully integrated. Sultan concluded that “Faith based work must focus on lifting the humanity of all peoples. It must put a human face and reality to the experience of migrants and refugees.”

During the roundtable discussion, a participant raised questions about the potential to influence or change politics as faith-based organizations. In reference to politics, Schroeder asserted that “personal acts of accompanying refugees in local communities...could motivate individuals to engage with local politicians”. Bailey noted the resource and manpower limitations of certain organizations in getting involved politically. Sultan contended that some level of political engagement is necessary to support the vulnerable, but the “challenge of politics is it’s the realm of compromise while faith is the realm of principle”. Given this reality, Sultan stated that faith-based engagement must be founded in determined core principles. Another participant asked, “How do we defend the dignity of refugees, of all peoples” in the modern political context? Schroeder contended that one could defend people’s dignity by listening to them and learning their aspirations. Bailey underscored the importance of vulnerability about one’s own challenges to create an environment in which people are more open to share. Sultan argued that we must “provide platforms and opportunities for most vulnerable to tell their stories... to put human face to a narrative...put a face to humanity.” Additionally, Sultan asserted the importance of educating people of the statistical realities (e.g. no evidence that refugees have brought increased violence to America) and the illogic of the arguments of all refugees as sexual predators. Another participant asked about whether “we [are] talking about the root issues of migration or asylum seeking?” and about forums to speak about these issues. The panelists referenced the CIRF (Center for Islamic Religious Freedom), Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International as potential forums, while acknowledging, “there’s not enough of these conversations happening.” Further topics broached during discussion included the importance of involving youth in advocacy for the disadvantaged, the unique ability of religious organizations to elevate the voices of refugees (given the logistical drawbacks that make such advocacy in the political sphere unlikely) and the importance of interfaith initiatives.