

*Excerpt from "The Refugee Crisis and the Politics of Holy Week" by Matthew Kaemingk (<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/the-refugee-crisis-and-the-politics-of-holy-week/10094884>)*

Two political voices - both simplistic and tired - currently frame the debate about refugees in America.

One voice frames it according to a political desire to protect American security, law and national identity. The other frames it according to a political desire to encourage American diversity, generosity and openness.

Put simply, if one side wants to build higher walls, the other wants to open wider doors...

...Where are American Christians on the refugee issue today? For the most part, American Christians are doing what they all too often do - they are allowing the polarizing secular ideologies of the right and left to take them by the hand and lead them. They are largely adopting either right-leaning nationalism or left-leaning multiculturalism as the moral guide in their response to refugees. Christians take these secular foundations, sprinkle Bible verse memes on top of them and declare the discovery of the "Christian response" to refugees.

As a theologian, I am not asked to provide a political answer to the refugee crisis. However, I can offer a theological framework through which Christian citizens can start to imagine a faithful response. This rests on the radical assumption that a Christian response to refugees should start with Christ.

In fighting over the "American house," one side has demanded the construction of higher walls while the other has demanded the opening of wider doors. This obsession with walls and doors misses a critical third element, the one thing that can turn this American house into a home.

Tables flourish in homes that are both secure and generous, just and merciful. Tables represent a hospitality that is both ordered and open. In light of this, I would argue that the ultimate end of Holy Week politics is not high walls or open doors; it is a well-set table.

After all, if a house is concerned with nothing but high walls and the security they provide, no one will ever be able to approach the table. Moreover, those left on the outside will begin to resent the table or doubt that it even exists. The law, order and security provided by walls are important political goods, however, they are not sufficient political ends in and of themselves. The ultimate purpose of politics is not the wall of security - it is the table of fellowship. The walls protect the table, the walls serve the table. If the walls inhibit the functioning of the hospitality of the table, they must be altered.

Likewise, if a house is focused simply on having an open door, no one will bother to set the table, prepare a meal, or sit graciously with the guests. Vague and distant openness ignores the critical importance and deep challenge of life together at the table. Guests wander about inside the house without a place to gather, connect, or build relationships with their hosts. The generosity of open doors is important and good but it is not a sufficient political end in and of itself. The open doors must lead to a well-prepared table. If hosts wish to let people in, they must count the cost of the meal, take a seat at the table next to guests, and be ready to vulnerably share their home with them.