



We must show mercy to the Biloela Family

By Archbishop Geoff Smith

The Christian perspective of the two-year detention of the Murugappan family must be based on what the Bible teaches us about the way in which we are to live rather than political pragmatism and fear of the foreigner.

Refugees and asylum seekers are not new.

In the book of Leviticus, the Israelites were reminded they were once refugees and were commanded; *“When an alien resides with you in your land you shall not oppress the alien, the alien who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”*

God’s love is for every human being, of every creed and colour, gender and race – not just those who look like us or share our beliefs.

Jesus taught us to love our neighbours as ourselves and to be good Samaritans to strangers. When this family fled Shri Lanka, that country had just seen the end of a terrible civil war in which the Tamil Tigers were defeated and their fear of reprisal was real.

The Australian Government decided not to accept many Tamils as refugees, despite their credible fear of persecution.

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The Murungappens came to Australia by boat arriving in 2012 and 2013. They met and married and applied for refugee status. Their two daughters were born here.

While the legal process of considering their refugee status proceeded they became part of the community of Biloela which demonstrated the loving embrace of the alien among them.

The family was torn away from that community and incarcerated on Christmas Island for no conceivable reason other than to make an example of them.

Not only has the family had the threat of deportation hanging over them, but they have been unnecessarily harshly dealt with to the detriment of their health and in the face of the serious illness of one of the children.

Whilst the legal process took its far-too-long path to completion, there was no real reason why the family could not have remained in Biloela – even if they are ultimately judged not to be refugees.

The Christian principle is clear. Foreigners in our midst, even if they arrive by boat, should be treated humanely while their circumstances are assessed.

I believe this family has been treated so badly that the law must be tempered with mercy.

The common decency of most Australians helps us to understand that this family have not been given a fair go. I urge Immigration Minister Alex Hawke to exercise his discretion to let this family stay.

The two girls were born here, they have the right to be Australians, and to have their parents stay with them.

Archbishop Geoff Smith is the Anglican Primate of Australia.

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