

## DIASPORA MISSIOLOGY: A CONTEMPORARY PARADIGM FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY REFUGEE MINISTRY

**Praveen Kodyattil\***

*United Theological College, Bangalore*

### **Abstract**

The refugee crisis is a pressing global issue, with millions of individuals forced to flee their homes due to conflict, persecution, and oppression. The church has a crucial role to play in responding to this crisis, as exemplified by Jesus' teachings on hospitality and love for strangers. This paper explores the concept of Diaspora Missiology, which focuses on understanding and engaging in God's redemptive mission among individuals who reside in locations other than their own homeland. It highlights the need for the church to prioritise the well-being of marginalised individuals, including refugees, and to mobilise Christians to actively participate in refugee ministry. The paper also discusses the response of the church and state to the refugee crisis, emphasising the need for a more compassionate and coordinated response that acknowledges the inherent dignity and worth of every human being. Additionally, it suggests innovative strategies to

---

\* Fr. Praveen Kodyattil, a priest of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, hails from the Thrissur district in Kerala. He completed his post-graduation in English literature from the University of Calicut before earning his Bachelor of Divinity at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Chennai, from 2013 to 2017. He furthered his theological education at the United Theological College, Bangalore, from 2018 to 2020. Ordained as a priest in 2019, Fr. Praveen served from 2020 to 2022 as a priest and youth in-charge in the Bangalore Diocese. From 2022 to 2024, he served as the Vicar of St. George JSO Church in Melbourne, Australia. Specialised in the "Mission of the Church," Fr. Praveen is currently in the process of joining the Doctor of Theology program under the Senate of Serampore College (University) at the United Theological College, Bangalore. His academic journey has been deeply fulfilling, providing him with numerous opportunities for rigorous theological study and reflection. Email: frpraveenk@gmail.com

transform the challenge posed by refugees into a valuable resource, such as language training, skills enhancement, and community-sponsored resettlement programs. Overall, the paper argues that the church has a critical role to play in addressing the refugee crisis and promoting a world where love, justice, and hospitality triumph over fear, indifference, and division.

**Key Words:** Refugees, Diaspora, Missiology, Hospitality, Humanitarian

## Introduction

The increasing number of afflicted individuals requires active intervention. In recent times, conflicts in several countries worldwide have resulted in a significant number of refugees seeking refuge in safer locations. Simultaneously, numerous countries have implemented border closures to prevent the entry of fleeing refugees, with the aim of safeguarding themselves from the burden of addressing such distressing circumstances, which is a crucial undertaking. Individuals are being displaced from their residences and encountering difficulties, resulting in a wretched existence characterised by apprehension for their personal safety and freedom, as well as that of their family members. The magnitude and severity of the Refugee issue warrant significant concern and the focus of the international community. The issue is closely connected to Human Rights breaches, which result in the difficult situation of Refugees who are forced to leave their typical homes, often enduring harsh conditions and facing both natural and mandated dangers along their journey.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the church addresses the needs of the increasing population of refugees in our society and their circumstances. This endeavours to discuss the church's involvement in addressing the crisis faced by refugees in different parts of the world and their liberation in the 21st century, highlighting the role of both the church and the state.

## Definition of the Term Diaspora and Refugees

Diaspora Missiology is a Missiological paradigm that focuses on comprehending and engaging in God's redemptive mission among

---

<sup>1</sup> T.V. Thomas and Elias Medeiros, "Toward Strategic Directions for Diaspora Missions: An Introduction," in *Scattered and Gathered: A Global compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, edited by Sadiri Joy Tira and Testunao Yamamori, Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016, 207.

individuals who reside in locations other than their own homeland.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of a Missiological perspective has led to the development of “Diaspora missions” as a modern mission strategy. Enoch Wan proposes a novel method of performing Missiological research that complements the existing technique. Applying the notion of Diaspora to all church operations helps establish the foundations of the church as a mission. This integration means that the church and mission are inseparable.<sup>3</sup> According to Lesslie Newbigin, the mission should be centred around the church. If the gospel is indeed true and provides insight into the ultimate direction of history, then the mission must align with this truth and be communicated to others. Additionally, it serves as a conceptual framework for comprehending and engaging in God’s restorative mission within Diaspora communities.<sup>4</sup> Refugees have been described in diverse ways across different contexts throughout human history. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines the term ‘Refugee’ as “an individual who has fled their native country due to political, religious, economic reasons, or as a result of armed conflicts.”<sup>5</sup> Refugees, as defined by Peter Vimalasekaran, are those who seek a location that offers them sanctuary, security, and sustenance.<sup>6</sup> The prevailing definition of a Refugee is found in Article 1 Paragraph 2 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which states: A refugee is an individual who is residing outside their country of nationality due to a legitimate fear of being persecuted based on their race, religion,

---

<sup>2</sup> Etymologically, the term Diaspora is derived from the Greek word “*diaspeirein*” which means “to scatter about” (disperse- from, *dia* -about, across+ *speirein* - to scatter) the term is found in Deuteronomy 28:25 in the Septuagint but assimilated broadly into English by the mid-1950s in reference to significant numbers of long-term expatriates.

<sup>3</sup> Enoch Wan and Michael Pocock, *Diaspora Missiology: Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World*, Littleton: William Carey Library, 2015, 122.

<sup>4</sup> W. Michael Goheen, “Significance of Lesslie Newbigin for Mission in the New Millennium,” in *Third Millennium* 7, 2004, 88.

<sup>5</sup> An interdisciplinary study of integrating Missiology with human geography, cultural anthropology, political demography, urban/ethnic studies, communication sciences. In the 1960’s its usage was extended to refer to the Africans who were taken away from their home continent. Only in the late twentieth century has the term been generalized to include other ethnic groups who have moved away from their homelands. In the 1990s the study of Diaspora became a discipline in the academic field. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/Refugee> accessed on 10 July 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Vimalasekaran, “Strategies for Reaching Refugees,” in *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, edited by Sadiri Joy Tira and Testunao Yamamori, Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016, 208.

nationality, membership in a specific social group, or political beliefs.<sup>7</sup> This person is either unable or unwilling to seek protection from their country of nationality due to this fear. Alternatively, a refugee can be someone who lacks a nationality, is outside their former habitual residence due to similar circumstances and is unable or unwilling to return to it.

### **Refugees in the Old Testament**

The Old Testament provides a comprehensive foundation for refugee care, justice, and hospitality. Hebrew Scriptures express God's sympathy for refugees and His people's duty to show it. Guideline inspiration came from Israelite refugee history. Egyptian enslavement and escape have an impact on their identity. In Exodus 22:21, God opposes mistreating or persecuting outsiders, reminding the Israelites of their own Egyptian exile. Leviticus 19:33-34 expands: "Do not abuse non-natives in your realm. Your non-native roommate should be treated like one. Treat them like you treated yourself as foreigners in Egypt. I dominate you divinely." Empathy and fairness stem from their shared history and divine permission. The Old Testament contains practical refugee legislation laws. Leviticus 23:22 prohibits landowners from harvesting their perimeters and gathering the remnants to feed the needy and foreigners. Deuteronomy 24:19-21 emphasizes setting apart harvest for strangers, fatherless, and widows to feed the vulnerable. Ruth demonstrates God's refugee protection. Boaz, Ruth's husband's relative, welcomes the Moabite widow to Israel. Ruth's support and marriage to Boaz showed divine justice and community integration. The prophets demonstrate God's concern for refugees. According to Jeremiah 22:3, "Thus saith the Lord: Execute justice and righteousness. Free the oppressed. Do not hurt the immigrant, fatherless, widow, or innocent people here." The Old Testament emphasizes refugee protection, provision, and fairness. It makes Christians remember their past, be kind and be just.

---

<sup>7</sup> Subramanya, "International provisions for Refugees," in *Refugees and their Right to Communicate: South Asian perspectives*, edited by Joshva Raja, London: World Association for Christian Communication, 2003, 88.

## Refugees in the New Testament

The New Testament draws from Jesus Christ and the early Christian church to demonstrate compassionate service to refugees, building on the Old Testament's focus. Early evidence of Jesus as a refugee is vital. To avoid King Herod's decree to kill all male children in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary smuggle baby Jesus to Egypt in Matthew 2:13-15. This event illustrates refugees' vulnerability and need for protection. Jesus consistently cared for immigrants and foreigners. The Good Samaritan story challenges racial and social inequalities (Luke 10:25-37). He portrays a Samaritan aiding a wounded Jew. This story emphasizes the need to love and care for all community members and sets a high standard for how a certain church should treat migrants. Jesus' Matthew 25:35-40 teachings encourage action. "I was an unfamiliar person and you welcomed me into your presence." This verse emphasizes that assisting the poor is like helping Christ. Believers should welcome strangers, especially refugees. Early Christians cared and included. Christians share resources and help the needy in Acts 2:44-45. Together, they helped refugees and persecuted victims, following Jesus' teachings. Paul's letters demonstrate New Testament care for misfits. Romans 12:13 encourages "practicing hospitality." In Hebrews 13:2, the Bible warns against leaving strangers who may have entertained angels. Jesus' teachings, early church support, and apostolic exhortations shape New Testament refugee relief. It inspires Christians to welcome, defend, and comfort refugees, showing Christ's love and Kingdom.

## A Synopsis of the Refugee Crisis Today

Refugees are people who have been forced to leave their homes and are afraid to return. Organised genocidal efforts, religious or political oppression, or the denial of basic civil rights may cause their displacement. The factors that compel an increasing number of individuals to leave their residences include the presence of unstable governments, significant upheavals within the Islamic world, and a fragmented global system.<sup>8</sup> It is unlikely that any of these circumstances will diminish in the near future. Over the past year, more than 1 million refugees have entered Europe through Greece after escaping the civil violence in Syria. Out of the 150,000 asylum-

---

<sup>8</sup> United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2019/8/5d5ab2dd4/unhcr-chief-pays-tribute-frontline-aid-workers.html>, 18 July 2023.

seekers who have arrived in 2016, 38 percent of them have been youngsters, as reported by U.N. Refugee Agency data. Dorothy Kweyu and Simeon state that mandatory detention camps have been established in certain locations, such as Italy.<sup>9</sup> David Miliband, the President of the International Rescue Committee, stated that the Syrian Refugee crisis is a clear manifestation of government cruelty, opposition violence, and international failure, with three million individuals serving as evidence of these issues.<sup>10</sup> This alarming milestone necessitates not just provoking indignation, but also prompting action, such as advocating for further assistance to the neighbouring countries of Syria that are already overwhelmed, as well as for the protection of those who remain within the country.

## The Salient Challenges Encountered by the Refugees

### Identity Issue

Issue of Identity Most host countries view refugees as temporary visitors, affording them limited or no rights. Once their entry visa expires, they are deemed unauthorised migrants and face the prospect of exploitation, destitution, or forced departure. Additionally, refugees often lack access to fundamental necessities such as food, water, and shelter. They are vulnerable to the control of those who hold power over the region where they are seeking shelter, usually without means of protection. They frequently hesitate to disclose their experiences due to potential repercussions from others in positions of authority.<sup>11</sup> Refugees have experienced traumatic events in their recent history, marked by disruption, horror, adversity, fear, torture, incarceration, and a struggle for survival. Currently, refugees frequently find themselves not only lacking a place to call home, but also, similar to the Palestinians, enduring a stateless existence that can persist for several decades. Refugees, overwhelmed by the distressing experience of being forced to abandon their homes, typically possess only the garments on their bodies.<sup>12</sup> Even missionary organisations operating

---

<sup>9</sup> Dorothy Kweyu and Simeon Havyarimana, *Refugees' Right to Communicate: A Call for Action*, Nairobi: World Association for Christian Communication, 2003, 19.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/european-refugee-crisis-child-detention-worrying-un-human-rights-chief-says-2381496> accessed on 2/08/2023.

<sup>11</sup> Dhyanchand Carr, "Towards a Proper Christian Response to the Problems Faced by Refugees and Migrant Workers," in *Uprooted people in Asia*, edited by Henriette Hutabarat, Hong Kong: CCA, 1995, 82.

<sup>12</sup> Jeanne Burger, "Lost in America: Mission opportunities among Refugees: A Missiological Research Study," in *Missio Apostolica* 12/2, 02 November 2014, 72.

among these groups may face challenges in sharing their tales, as they rely on official authorisation to carry out their work.

### **Human Trafficking**

Women and children, like other refugees, are the primary victims who encounter a multitude of challenges due to their forced displacement. During their journey, they encounter many physical hazards, such as perils that arise while fleeing their village. Additionally, they experience stress as they try to adjust to a new cultural setting. They also grapple with doubts regarding their own identities, as well as feelings of guilt and concern for people they have left behind.<sup>13</sup> They also encounter specific challenges of sexual assault and mistreatment from the individuals they are trying to escape, as well as occasionally from the very people they turn to for safety. Furthermore, they are particularly susceptible to sexual exploitation and intimidation at the border. Arriving at the camps exposes them to potential aggression from camp authorities. In some instances, when they are unable to secure an adequate amount of food for their family, they may resort to engaging in prostitution. Children who come to Europe and apply for asylum are often placed in jail cells. During an address to the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva, Zeid Ra-ad Al Hussein, the human rights leader, expressed concern about the increasing use of prison cells or centres surrounded by barbed wire to detain unaccompanied children. Children encounter challenges pertaining to their identity, education, and nourishment. Approximately 30% of the individuals who escape from Syria will seek refuge in designated camps, albeit temporarily.<sup>14</sup> The other majority will predominantly become urban refugees, often residing in overcrowded accommodations and occasionally in unsanitary conditions. Due to the camp's significant size and limited resources, the majority of the Refugees are not located in close proximity to schools or medical facilities.

### **Metaphysical and Character-Related Concerns**

The analysis revealed five prominent themes related to personality and spirituality: (1) shame, (2) sadness, (3) contradicting Christian imagery, (4) adherence to beliefs, and (5) yearning for liberation.

---

<sup>13</sup> A. Scott Moreau, "Refugee mission work," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000, 816.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth G. Ferris, *Beyond Borders: Refugees, Migrants and Human Rights in the Post-Cold War Era*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993, 108-113.

Shame often pertained to events that occurred in one's country of origin.<sup>15</sup> An American missionary, who had been engaged in assisting Refugees, elucidates that a significant number of Refugees bear a substantial sense of culpability for the adverse outcomes and aftermath experienced by their families left behind, consequences that they had not foreseen when they made the arduous choice to seek refuge for a more favourable existence. In his autobiography, a Refugee recounted that his father was jailed, and all his brothers were compelled to engage in forced labour as a consequence of his own actions. Refugees had various losses that caused them sadness, such as leaving family behind, losing a limb or an eye, depriving their children of the opportunity to grow up in their own culture, or giving up on their future ambitions. However, they were reluctant to openly express their sorrow. Paul Jeffery examines the religious concerns of Christians, specifically noting that refugees have a positive perception of Christianity due to the kind assistance they have gotten from Christians either leaving their home country or upon arriving in Europe. Some individuals even claimed to have embraced Christianity while residing in the Refugee camps.<sup>16</sup> However, other individuals had mixed or unfavourable responses towards Christianity due to personal experiences associated with the religion. For the majority of Refugees, their religion was inseparable from their identity; as a result, they strongly asserted their determination to maintain their religious convictions.<sup>17</sup> It is common to hear phrases such as "being Bosnian means being Muslim" or "being Burmese means being Buddhist." Within the group of refugees, certain individuals provided intricate descriptions of the mosques in their native countries, while others maintained Buddhist shrines within their living spaces. However, a significant number of refugees expressed concerns that Christianity could attempt to alter their religious beliefs.<sup>18</sup> The pervasive yearning for freedom that was constantly alluded to transcended mere political discourse. It seemed to be at the heart of the Refugees' souls. Freedom is often linked to other concepts, particularly the attainment of peace and security.

---

<sup>15</sup> A. Richard Kauffman, "Syrian Refugee Crisis Hits Neighbouring Countries," in *The Christianity Century* 130/8, April, 2013, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Jeffery, "Room at the Inn: Refugees Hope for Hospitality," in *The Christian Century* 132/25, December 2015, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth G. Ferris, *Beyond Borders: Refugees, Migrants and Human Right*, 88.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Jeffery, "Room at the Inn: Refugees Hope for Hospitality," in *The Christian Century*, 18.



## **The Problem of Human Rights Violation**

Refugees are those who are deprived of national safeguard and compelled to reside in a foreign nation. They are considered one of the most susceptible segments of human civilisation. They are victims of human rights violations in their countries of origin and often receive unwelcoming treatment in their countries of asylum. They are frequently regarded as undesirable foreigners who have the capacity to pose significant threats to the social, economic, and political structure of the host country.<sup>19</sup> As the asylum nations' attitude worsens, refugees frequently become targets of human rights violations in the host country as well. This is the consequence of their limited operating rights and the media bias against them in the host country. Consequently, their entitlement to freedom of speech and expression is withheld throughout all levels of society. Richard Carver and Guglielmo Verdirame, authors for Article 19, Global Campaign for Free Expression, outline the specific requirements for refugees as follows: access to information regarding their rights as refugees, the freedom to voice their opinions on political matters in both their home country and the country they seek asylum in, the right to express grievances related to their circumstances, the preservation of their cultural and artistic heritage in their homeland, and the entitlement to comprehensive and accurate information about conditions in their home country, particularly before considering voluntary repatriation.<sup>20</sup>

## **WCC Declaration Regarding the Refugee Crisis**

The WCC/UN high-level conference on the Refugee crisis in Europe, held at the Ecumenical Centre Geneva on 18-19 January 2016, has issued a statement titled "Europe's Response to the Refugee Crisis: From Origin to Transit, Reception and Refuge - A Call for Shared Responsibility and Coordinated Action." The conference had the objective of advocating for systematic, human rights-oriented, and well-coordinated approaches to addressing the challenges faced by refugees and migrants in Europe, as well as tackling the underlying factors that lead to their forced displacement.<sup>21</sup> The conference allowed faith-based organisations to apply their religious principles,

---

<sup>19</sup> Mark Galli, "A Church Welcome for the Tired, the Poor: How the Refugee Crisis Makes for a Beautiful Gospel Witness," in *Christianity Today* 59/9, November 2015, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth G. Ferris, *Beyond Borders: Refugees, Migrants and Human Rights*, 101.

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Hoffmann, "Solidarity with Strangers as Part of the Mission of the Church," in *International Review of Mission* 78/309, January, 1989, 53.

particularly the belief that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, in order to prioritise the human dignity and rights of all individuals affected by the situation, regardless of their origin or status as refugees or migrants. These individuals are entitled to receive care, protection, and support for their dignity, rights, and well-being. The conference attendees advocated for increased collaborative involvement from the global community in addressing the political issues that underlie the current unparalleled global catastrophe of forced displacement, including conflict, violence, inequality, and exclusion. We specifically implore everyone with the ability to intervene and mitigate the unbearable agony in Syria to set aside their political disagreements and unite in collective efforts for peace immediately. The conference attendees agree that mitigating the distress of individuals impacted by displacement is a collective obligation, not only inside Europe but also in other regions. It is crucial for governments, civil society, international agencies, and other stakeholders to collaborate in a systematic and synchronised manner to ensure a secure and compassionate environment for refugees and migrants. This collaboration should address the immediate needs of individuals fleeing from war, widespread violence, and oppression. Additionally, it should focus on promoting social inclusion and integration over the long term.<sup>22</sup> Expanding and facilitating safe and legal access for refugees coming to Europe is of paramount urgency. Implementing a policy of closing national borders to refugees is not a viable solution because it only transfers the obligation to the subsequent country.

### **Church: A Community of Hospitality**

The church must prioritise the well-being of currently marginalised individuals in its mission to emulate the actions of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, individuals such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Ruth encountered the plight of becoming refugees. Similarly, Jesus and his parents sought refuge in Egypt. Gustavo Gutierrez delivered a sermon before a Vatican assembly, urging the church to transform into a Samaritan church. The neighbour is not merely an individual encountered along our path, but rather someone with whom we actively engage, deviating from our own trajectory in

---

<sup>22</sup> A. Richard Kauffman, "Syrian Refugee Crisis Hits Neighbouring Countries," in *The Christianity*, 15.

order to establish meaningful connections with others.<sup>23</sup> A Samaritan church is a church that is welcoming and responsive to the needs of people. A church composed only of morally upright people is unnecessary. We require a place of worship that embodies compassion. Hence, engaging in mission within marginalised communities involves acknowledging the knowledge systems of the people, attentively hearing the pleas of the disadvantaged, and addressing the evident manifestations of oppression by understanding the surrounding circumstances.<sup>24</sup> The current imperative is for the church to undertake decisive measures, guided by exemplars, and strive to empower Refugees primarily through engagement in these areas.

### **Mobilisation of Refugee Workers**

It is crucial to mobilise and inspire Christians to actively participate in Refugee ministry to effectively reach out to refugees. Refugees are often stigmatised and misunderstood, with little appreciation because it compels them to flee their homeland. People have a fundamental requirement to demonstrate compassion and affection towards individuals who require assistance. To accomplish this, it is necessary to rally individuals within local churches and provide accurate information regarding the challenges faced by refugees. Most of the refugees consist of young individuals. By forsaking their nations, residences, loved ones, and companions, they are also forfeiting the most crucial chance for whole human development: education.<sup>25</sup> Repeatedly, in affluent countries, educational possibilities could be offered to the refugees who have been relocated there. Furthermore, they could assist the large population of displaced individuals in impoverished nations by presenting the subsequent possibilities. Distance learning institutions can offer courses through learning packets that include printed and audio materials. These materials can be studied independently or with the assistance of qualified individuals such as refugees or volunteers from humanitarian organisations.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, educational institutions could deploy

---

<sup>23</sup> Tom Heneghan, "Churches vary in response to Refugees," in *The Christian Century* 132/21, October, 2015, 16.

<sup>24</sup> George Zachariah, "Church: An Inclusive Community of Hospitality, Fellowship and Solidarity," in *Borders and Margins: Re-visioning Ministry and Mission*, edited by Dexter S. Maben, Thiruvalla & Bangalore: CSS & UTC, 2015, 461.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Vimalasekaran, "Strategies for Reaching Refugees," in *Scattered and Gathered*, 212.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Raper, *Accompanying the Refugees*, Bangalore: JRS South Asia, 1999, 37-38.

faculty members to deliver in-person instruction in specific areas that have been identified as necessary for the displaced population. Furthermore, refugees who have demonstrated commitment to their fellow displaced individuals and exhibit the potential to pursue advanced education can be provided with scholarships to enrol in a college or university.<sup>27</sup> This opportunity is contingent upon their agreement to utilise their newly acquired knowledge and skills to assist the displaced community to which they belong.

### **Transforming the Refugees into Labourers**

To proactively address future requirements, innovative strategies should be formulated to transform the challenge posed by refugees into a valuable resource. Indications suggest that the substantial influx of refugees has already resulted in a positive overall impact on European economies. According to the Autumn 2015 European Economic Forecast, the introduction of more public spending has resulted in a 0.2% growth in GDP. In the near future, we can anticipate a more significant beneficial effect on economic growth resulting from the expansion of the workforce.<sup>28</sup> For refugees to be able to enter the labour market, it is necessary to establish suitable policies. One crucial stage in transforming refugees into skilled workers is to ensure they become proficient in the local language, get their educational and professional qualifications acknowledged, and enhance their skills through extra training.<sup>29</sup> This is essential for their effective integration. Therefore, while considering the beneficial economic effects of refugee influx on host nations. Furthermore, it is imperative to implement gender-specific initiatives aimed at promoting financial independence among women.

### **The Response of the Church and the State to the Refugee Crisis**

The response of the Church and the State to the refugee crisis has been a complicated and diverse phenomenon that has been defined by both compassion and debate among those who have responded. Through the provision of unconditional hospitality and love to strangers, as well as the provision of spiritual support, food, shelter, and clothing to those who are fleeing war, persecution, and

---

<sup>27</sup> Gerhard Hoffmann, "Solidarity with Strangers as Part of the Mission of the Church," 55.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth G. Ferris, *Beyond Borders: Refugees, Migrants and Human Rights*, 89.

<sup>29</sup> Dorothy Kweyu and Simeon Havyarimana, *Refugees' Right to communicate: A Call for Action*, 112.

destruction, the Church has on the one hand, exemplified the teachings of Christ. Additionally, churches have been outspoken in their support of the rights of refugees, questioning laws and attitudes that are discriminatory. On the other hand, the response of the state has been characterized by a conflict between humanitarian concerns and national security considerations.<sup>30</sup> This conflict has led to policies that frequently emphasize border control and asylum procedures over the welfare of refugees. Although some countries have provided major humanitarian relief and resources, others have enacted laws that penalize refugees and propagate negative stereotypes. Various nations have applied these policies. Despite these problems, there are examples of best practices and innovative solutions, such as community-sponsored refugee resettlement programs and ecumenical activities that promote interfaith conversation and understanding. These are just two examples. The refugee crisis has brought to light the necessity of a more compassionate and coordinated response from both the Church and the State.<sup>31</sup> This response should acknowledge the inherent dignity and worth of every human being and work towards the creation of a world in which love, justice, and hospitality triumph over fear, indifference, and division.

Church leaders around Europe were also urgently seeking homes, food, and other essential provisions to accommodate an increasing number of refugees fleeing from conflict and oppression. The surge of philanthropic efforts ensued in response to Pope Francis' call for Roman Catholic parishes to emulate the Vatican's example and provide shelter for refugee families. Europe is currently facing its most severe refugee crisis in many years. The Roman Catholic Church has the ability to play a significant role in assisting with the resettlement of the increasing number of displaced Syrians, Africans, and other refugees on the continent. The Pope's call for volunteers is not without precedent in the Catholic Church. Mary Gautier emphasized the global involvement of Churches, especially those in the U.S. and Australia, in providing refuge to Polish refugees during the 1980s solidarity movement.<sup>32</sup> This movement involved workers employing civil resistance strategies to confront the Communist state. She asserts that the Pope's recent proclamation is a pragmatic reaction to a crisis that

---

<sup>30</sup> A. Richard Kauffman, "Syrian Refugee crisis hits neighbouring countries," in *The Christianity*, 45.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Raper, *Accompanying the Refugees*, 78.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth G. Ferris, *Beyond Borders: Refugees, Migrants and Human Rights*, 10.

has caused European leaders to urgently seek a resolution. Nevertheless, several religious leaders acknowledged that they could face restrictions imposed by the rules of a specific country.

### **Reflection and Conclusion**

Given the increasing number of suffering individuals, it is imperative for Christians, along with others, to actively intervene and provide assistance to these individuals. The recent crises in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, Southern Sudan, Palestine, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and other nations have resulted in large numbers of people seeking asylum in safer locations. Simultaneously, numerous countries have implemented border closures to prevent the influx of fleeing migrants, aiming to shield themselves from the burden of managing such profound suffering. Christianity in the current century faces significant challenges due to the rapid global upheavals. Traditional Missiology has been questioned, and new agendas have emerged in missiological circles. Additionally, the concerns faced by refugees are intricate and multifaceted. In current missiological circles, there is a focus on finding answers for many difficulties related to the church and the community. One proposed solution is to use the way we welcome guests as a model for how we should approach our contact with refugees. It is crucial to determine practical methods through which a mission might serve as an expression of individuals' sense of emancipation. Instead, we should convert our words into tangible actions to ensure that the opinions and perspectives of refugees are not only acknowledged but also given the utmost consideration. This will involve clearly outlining the duties and responsibilities of everyone, as well as actively sharing information, expertise, resources, and activities. It also includes using each other's unique talents and advantages and ensuring mutual accountability. Concrete procedures are necessary to establish strategic planning, execution, accountability, and a plan of action to define clear, quantifiable, achievable, and time-bound goals.

A comprehensive strategy for the churches might be established by engaging in discussions and collaboration with church partners from various regions with the aim of organising a synchronised lobbying campaign. A consultation of this nature could establish a consensus on key areas for action and formulate a strategy for church groups in various regions or countries to develop policy positions and actively promote their adoption in relevant forums. This is important because there are numerous domains where churches can proactively

contribute to shaping a new global framework for displaced populations. The international system underscores the obligation of the international community to safeguard and provide aid to those compelled to leave their nations due to circumstances beyond their control. Furthermore, it encompasses collective accountability in preventing violence that displaces individuals in relation to the pursuit of peace and justice. As a result, churches can actively engage with displaced individuals to help establish a new global system. This is a pressing requirement and a significant duty of the Church and all Christians who profess to represent and follow Jesus Christ, the Saviour.