



Refugees

Thomas Curran, S.J. Rockhurst University
Michael Stellern, Ph.D., Rockhurst University

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Plight of the Refugees: Greatest Humanitarian Crisis since World War II?

While vacationing in Rome, in the summer of 2016, Dr. Michael Stellern, an Economics Professor at the Jesuit College, Rockhurst University, called for a cab. The driver took a slightly different route that Michael did not initially recognize. Suddenly, the cab was in the middle of hundreds, maybe thousands, of Syrian refugees on the streets, making it difficult for the cab to move forward. The cab driver made an obscene gesture and shouted several Italian obscenities at the crowd. He indicated that these intruders did not belong in his city. He believed they were ruining Rome. They had no jobs, they did not understand Italian, and there was no place for them to go at night. Michael empathized with the driver, but he also understood that these Syrians had arrived involuntarily in order to escape danger and possible death in their own homeland.

Similarly, Pope Francis, had observed the flood of refugees impacting Europe and his own neighborhood in Rome. His personal experiences and observations led him to assert that the plight of refugees was the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. His claim was verified by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). In 2015, UNHCR reported that the number of refugees and displaced exceeded 50 million people thereby surpassing what was experienced in the aftermath of the Second World War. To address the humanitarian crisis of epic proportions, the Pope selected Cardinal Peter Turkson to lead a dicastery to address this global phenomenon. What could Cardinal Turkson possibly do to address this global challenge?

Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome

Upon his election as pope and the bishop of Rome in March 2013, Cardinal Mario Bergoglio, previously bishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, became acutely aware of the plight of refugees. Within the first few months of his pontificate, he made his first pastoral visit, outside of Rome, to Lampedusa, Italy's island of migrants and refugees, where he excoriated the rich for what he called "globalization of indifference."



In January 2017, the pope established a Dicastery, also known as an office or department, for Promoting Human Integral Development and appointed Cardinal Peter Turkson, of Ghana, as its first prefect. Francis stated that "in all her being and actions, the Church is called to promote the integral development of the human person in light of the gospel." He made this announcement through a *motu proprio*, meaning on his own initiative. While the dicastery was to address the work of four departments, established after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), it would involve a particular emphasis upon the plight of migrants and refugees. Additionally, because of his personal interest in the issue, the pope reserved his right for continued personal involvement. It became Turkson's task to reconcile Francis' poetry of concern with the prose of policy.

In August 2017, Pope Francis issued his message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees to be commemorated on January 15, 2018. In the message, he indicated that providing aid to refugees was a "great responsibility which the Church intended to share with all believers and men and women of good will, who were called to respond to the many challenges of contemporary migration with generosity, promptness, wisdom, and foresight, each according to their own abilities." He indicated that the care of migrants and refugees could be summarized in four verbs: to welcome, protect, promote and integrate. (Pope Francis, 2017)

The Roman Curia as Dicasteries

The "Vatican" has been more accurately described as the Roman Curia. The Roman Curia was a collection or grouping of departments working under the Pope. These special departments were frequently referred to as dicasteries. Dicastery came from the Greek and it means "place of justice." Taylor Marshall, a Vatican expert, suggested that the heads of dicasteries might be compared to the cabinet of the President of the United States. The analogy limped somewhat because the pope was a very distinct and separate entity than the President. The Pope usually appointed Cardinals as heads of the dicasteries to assist him in the overall governance of the Church.

There were six dicasteries that were frequently listed. Pope Francis created two of them: the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, which was headed by Cardinal Turkson, and the more recently created Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life. The most powerful dicastery was The Secretariat of State headed by the Cardinal Secretary of State. There was also a Secretariat for the Economy to oversee the financials of the Church. The second most powerful dicastery of the Church was the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. (Marshall, 2017)

Cardinal Peter Turkson, Bishop of Ghana

Pope Francis appointed Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana to respond to the plight of the refugees and migrants. Prefect Turkson was described as a "joy filled" Ghanaian, whom the Italian newspapers described as a *papabile*, someone worthy or eligible to become Pope. Cardinal



Turkson a relatively unknown, but much respected Cardinal had to address this humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. He fit into the overall governance structure of the Vatican as head of a dicastery. This was a great opportunity for Cardinal Turkson but a serious challenge.

The Reverend Thomas Curran, S J., president of Rockhurst University, and Michael J. Stellern, Ph. D in economics interviewed Cardinal Turkson in September, 2016, by phone to learn more about his plans and hopes. During the interview with Prefect Turkson, he expressed how he intended to pursue the pope's desire for a comprehensive approach addressing the issues facing migrants and refugees. He hoped that the European Union, as well as countries like the United States, and others would be able to absorb the influx of migrants and refugees, at least some of them. He cautioned that the crisis would be compounded, if the receiving nations, despite their good intentions, did not open up to the possibility of welcoming and integrating the new arrivals.

He used the metaphor of “water running from a tap” to describe how the solution to the migration crisis cannot be limited to the goodwill of the receiving countries. That would be like limiting ourselves to simply mopping the water that fell from a tap, without trying also to turn off the tap. The tap needs to be turned off. If the causes of migration were not looked at, and if we did not attempt to solve them, and let people stay in their countries, we would forever be mopping water from a running tap.

When asked about what role or part the United States could play, Turkson suggested that the U.S. may revert to the sentiments that led to the installation of the statue of liberty on the island of New York, facing new arrivals from Europe. The statue welcomed new arrivals, because it was understood that they were fleeing from hostile conditions and wanted freedom. That experience has not ended in the history of humanity. The new arrivals now may not all be coming by sea or by boat. They may come on foot, scaling walls, digging tunnels and on dingy boats. He recalled, further, the address of Pope Francis to the U.S. Congress in September 2015 reminding the nation and its leaders of their history as a nation of immigrants. He made the request that the United States look to its southern neighbors especially Mexico and the Central American nations. He asked in the name of our common humanity, that all person be treated with respect, on account of their human dignity.

Who are the refugees?

Firstly, it would be helpful to define some terms. While the terms refugee and migrants were frequently used interchangeably, there was a distinct difference between the two. They were often confused because both referred to people in movement. Hence, they were often lumped together reflecting a group of people on the move; however, migrants and refugees moved for different reasons. Refugees were forced to move; migrants had the choice to move or stay put. Refugees fled because of armed conflict or persecution. Refugees were defined and protected in international law. According to UNHCR, there were 21.3 million refugees at the end of 2015. Most refugees resided in camps for years while awaiting placement. Often, these camps lacked electricity, running water, and basic necessities.



Migrants, on the other hand, chose to move to improve their lives not because of the threat of persecution or death. The choice to move could have been for reasons of pursuing an educational experience, an economic opportunity, or the reunion of a family. The UNHCR defined migrant as a “person residing in a nation-state other than the one in which he or she was born.” The same organization estimated that approximately 231 million migrant persons, approximately 3% of the world’s population, existed in 2015. The Internal Organization for Migration estimated in 2010 that between 10 and 15 percent of the migrant population were undocumented. At the same time, there were 26 million internally displaced people.

For a fuller explanation of the terms refugee, internally displaced person (IDP), stateless person, asylum seeker, as well as the expanded focus of the Geneva Convention (1951) that concentrated upon the Europeans displaced after WWII to its 1967 Protocol which expanded the scope of the Convention to include displaced from all over the world. (UNHCR, 2017)

Refugee Crisis

The Pope was not alone in his assertion that this was the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. In 2015, on June 20th, a day designated annually as World Refugee Day, the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) made a similar observation. Alexander Betts (Leopold Muller Professor of Forced Migration and International Affairs at the University of Oxford) and Paul Collier (Professor of Economics and public policy in the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford), members of the UNHCR, defined the refugee crisis as what happened when large numbers of people fled poor, violent countries and sought asylum in rich, peaceful countries that raised agonizing moral and political questions. They reported that 65 million uprooted displaced people remained within their own countries, but that close to a third or over 20 million had no alternative but to cross the border and officially become a refugee (Betts and Collier, 2017. 1). In 2015, a million refugees left Syria and others left from other parts of the world and poured into the European borders. They threatened the liberal order of Europe and were the cause, rather than the victims of the crisis.

The plight of the displaced people today was not so much a crisis as a global phenomenon. Like climate change, it required a global solution. Climate change affected everyone but displaced persons affected themselves and their immediate neighbors, and so did not provoke the urgency among the world’s political leaders.

The refugee ordeal had been nothing but a systemic failure and demanded rigorous thinking. The distinction between a refugee and an economic migrant was an important one. A refugee was anyone who had no recourse except flight to avoid the threat of serious physical harm but not someone who only wanted to flee desperate conditions. It was essential to distinguish between the two. The failure to distinguish such a line could be catastrophic for host countries. Countries have a responsibility to take care of refugees but not economic migrants.



There was a distinction regarding the rights of the refugees. They did not have a right to pick a country, but they did have a right to shelter but not maximal prosperity or comfort. All nations had a duty of solidarity toward those in flight. This meant that a nation had to provide temporary and permanent refuge, and it meant that other countries might have to pay countries to support this goal. The duty of care was not limited to physical protection but included opportunities for a decent life. The staggering number of misplaced persons was not about to be diminished any time in the near future. Betts and Collier realized that until now the response had oscillated between the “heartless head” and the “headless heart.” Nonetheless, countries have performed a precious service by “reasoning with their heart and feeling with their head.” (Betts and Collier, 2017. 98).

Syrian Refugee Crisis

When Dr. Stellern returned to the United States, he asked his students to look into what caused the Syrian refugee crisis. The Syrian refugee crisis really began with the Syrian civil war, which officially began March 15, 2011. (Associate Press, 2013) There were peaceful protestors who called for government reform in the streets in southern Syria. The movement spread throughout the country. As a result of the protests, there were strong government crackdowns and ever increasing acts of violence on both sides. This, of course, severely weakened the government and brought about the destruction of social services and institutions. The result was that Syria had become a textbook case of the fragile state.

The estimates were that half of Syria’s population fled their homes. There were 5.1 million who were refugees and left their country, while another 6.3 million people had left their homes but remained in Syria—the internally displaced persons, or IDPs. More than 470,000 people had been killed, and that included more than 55,000 children. The infrastructure collapsed with estimates that 95 percent of people lacked adequate healthcare, and 70 percent lacked regular access to clean water. Only half the children remained in school. The economy collapsed and 80 percent of the people lived in poverty. The most haunting picture of the Syrian refugee that everyone remembered was the picture of the limp body of the lifeless toddler that had been washed up on the Greek beach. The body laid contorted and face down.

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)

In 1980, the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) founded the Jesuit Refugee Service. Its stated purpose was to accompany, serve, and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. It was founded at the behest of Father Pedro Arrupe, SJ. Father Arrupe was the 28th superior general of the Jesuits. It was both a Catholic organization and a work of the Jesuits to show compassion and love for the poor and excluded.



JRS offered services at both the national and regional levels with the support of an international office in Rome. The organization was officially registered on March 19, 2000 at the Vatican State as a foundation.

One of the effects of the Vietnam conflict was the proliferation of boat people seeking a new homeland. Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who was then the Superior general of the Society of Jesus, felt compelled to act and bring at least some relief to such a tragic situation. He wanted the Jesuits to provide a humanitarian response to this international dilemma. The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) was the response. Today, the JRS is found in 51 countries. It boasted having over 1,400 workers including 78 Jesuits and 66 religious from other congregations. The primary focus of JRS was education, emergency assistance, healthcare, livelihood activities and social services. In its 2015 annual report, JRS claimed that more than 724,550 individuals have been direct beneficiaries of their projects.

JRS consistently understood refugees as all forcibly displaced people. Its efforts have been rooted in Catholic Social Teaching which was focused upon human dignity and the promotion of the common good. Succinctly stated, JRS was the Jesuits and their companions embracing faith that does justice, hospitality in action. Fr. Arrupe and St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, believed that their companions were to engage the world fully. This meant using technology, global markets, finances, and other resources to save souls and to serve those in need.

The JRS reported that a quarter of humanity lived on the edge, fighting to survive and to have some sort of dignity, because of the unjust structures of the world. There were conflicts because people scrambled for their share of the dwindling economic resources. This portion of humanity lived in social disintegration and in failed states. There was no security for them, and climate change presented new threats. They contend that more than 15 million of poor were refugees, who ended up being forcibly displaced from their homes. Over 25 million have been internally displaced in their own countries. Approximately, 70 percent of all, forcibly displaced persons were of the Islamic faith and major displacements occur in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.

The refugees frequently remained invisible in urban areas. They were confronted with ever higher walls and frontiers of exclusion in European countries, as well as other wealthy countries throughout the world. They were denied basic rights for protection in ever growing environments of hostility, especially toward refugees.

The JRS was very much concerned with advocacy and human rights work. The 1951 Geneva Convention tried to guarantee that refugees should be given full rights while in exile and during repatriations. The convention worked to strengthen the protection offered to internally displaced persons (IDPs). It argued for the promotion of international human rights legislation and through participation in international campaigns and coalitions. It encouraged membership in international fora such as the UN Economic and Social committee (ECOSOC).



The Refugee Crisis as a Moral Issue

Catholic Social Teaching

When Pope Francis established the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development in 2017, he added his voice to this moral imperative. This act was consistent with the Vatican's promotion of its Gospel message and Catholic Social Teachings as well as its encyclicals. The first emphasis appeared at the end of the 19th century in *Rerum Novarum* (1891). This was the inaugural Catholic Social Teaching (CST) encyclical. Pope Leo, the author of the encyclical, addressed the fact that the flight of the refugee was most often involuntary. "No one would exchange his country for a foreign land if his own afforded him the means of living a decent and happy life."

The moral argument emphasized upholding and promoting human dignity, bodily integrity, and the unity of the family. In *Exsul Familia Nazarethana* (1952), considered the Magna Carta for the refugee, Pope Pius XII spoke to the mass movement that was occurring in the aftermath of World War II. "The ... Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family.... the models of every refugee... whether compelled by fear of persecution or want, is forced to leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends and to seek a foreign soil."

The Catholic Church first celebrated the World Day of Migrants in 1914, and has continued to celebrate it since then. It was a day set aside to reflect upon the role migration played in history. Additionally, it was an opportunity for popes and conferences of bishops to express concern especially for refugees, and their need for hospitality, as well as the obligations our shared humanity places upon us all. On the 100th anniversary of the World Day of Migrants (1914), Pope Francis commented: "The Church without frontiers, Mother to all, spreads throughout the world a culture of acceptance and solidarity, in which no one is seen as useless, out of place, or disposable."

Throughout the corpus of CST and various documents from the Vatican there have been repeated references to keeping a family intact. In his 1990 Lenten address, St. John Paul II emphasized: "Refugees must be guaranteed the right to establish a family or be reunited with their families; to have a stable, dignified occupation and a just wage; to live in dwellings fit for human beings; to receive adequate education for their children and young people, as well as adequate health care."

The plight of the refugees was a moral dilemma that threatened the common good of authentic development for all. Its causes and effects could only be addressed by the international community. The causes were triggered by the involuntary migration in the first place. The acute effects were those things the refugees faced and had to be addressed upon arriving in a new nation.

The resolution of the refugee crisis rested with a commitment from the international community to eliminate the conflicts and violence that have forced people to flee in the first place. Until that



goal might be achieved, there needed to be adequate programs for those areas struck by the worst injustices and instability.

Pope Francis has been one of the strongest and most consistent voices for the refugee crisis. He repeatedly insisted that the issue would not go away on its own. He also held tight to the belief that the issue was the collective responsibility of all. In his 2017 Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees, he reiterated these contentions; “I ask everyone to help those who, for various reasons, are forced to live far from their homeland and are separated from their families. The refugee today was not a phenomenon limited to some areas of the planet. It affected all continents and was growing into a tragic situation of global proportions.” The promotion of the common good, the building up of the human community that everyone shared, was, in many ways, an endorsement of Article 25 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights which enumerated those things necessary for the health and well-being of an individual.

It was absolutely necessary, then, to deal with the causes that bring about forcible migrations in the countries of origin. This required the commitment of the whole international community to eliminate the conflicts and violence that forced people to flee. Furthermore, far-sighted perspectives were necessary that were capable of offering adequate programs for areas struck by the worst injustices and instability. Succinctly stated, care for the refugees remained a moral imperative.

United Nations

Cardinal Turkson had several resources to consider in addressing the morality of the refugee crisis. One of the most universally accepted would be the United Nations. The United Nations codified the moral imperative for the care of migrants and refugees in 1948. It is found in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Article 13, as stated below.

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

The United Nations, an intergovernmental organization of 193 nations, had always sought world-wide peace, cooperation, and development that is both economic and social. Its Declaration of Human Rights was rooted in Natural Law which was based in the philosophy or belief that certain rights or values were provided through a transcendent or by virtue of human nature. This knowledge and insights could be known through human reason.

Article 25 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights enumerated those things necessary for the health and well-being of an individual and family. The list included food, housing, medical care, and appropriate social services. It included the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other factors that made a person unable to earn his livelihood.



Strategy for the Cardinal

It was clear that the pope intended to remain personally involved in the refugee crisis. This certainly would be consoling and concerning for the Cardinal. Pope Francis made the refugee crisis a consistent part of his pastoral messages to the world. Since becoming pope in 2013, he had seen first hand, not unlike one of the authors of this case study, the impact the crisis had upon Rome. On a daily basis, Pope Francis saw how the crisis directly impacted the displaced refugees as well as its indirect consequences upon the current residents of the eternal city. The refugees were arriving in Rome out of necessity and their survival stretched and strained the resources of the city and country.

Cardinal Turkson was well advised to return to his metaphor of the water coming from the tap to characterize the refugee crisis. If water came from the tap too quickly or in greater abundance than the vessel in place to receive it, there would be a need for a plan for its placement or there would be a flood of needs much greater than the resources to absorb them. Given the millions of refugees from Syria and the rest of the world, there was no obvious or quick solution. To slow down the flood, it was necessary to return to the source of the surge. This meant calling for stability and protection in the countries from where the refugees began their forced journeys. In a country like Syria, this was not a task that could be easily accomplished. The success or failure of Cardinal Turkson, as the first prefect of the new dicastery, just might rest more in what he did to bring about stability and protection in the countries from where the refugees began their journey rather than what he did to address their plight after their forced departure.

The dimensions of the refugee problem were enormous. Cardinal Turkson had been given a huge task. The task transcended countries, people, languages, religions, and cultures. There was no one single solution. He was tasked to provide for the millions of refugees throughout the world. He had to put together two or three basic goals that emphasized the immediate short run and the long run planning process. How could he implement the Pope's strategy? How could he address this global challenge? For an overview of the perspective of Pope Francis, see Zenit Staff for the link.



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