PART 2
References to refugees in key documents of Catholic Social Teaching

While the value of *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity* lies in its synthesis of Catholic teaching in this area, the key documents of Catholic Social Teaching from which it is drawn carry more authority. The documents examined below are of relatively high formal authority in Catholic teaching and so their pronouncements on matters of principle make a strong claim on Catholics.

Each of the key documents of Catholic social teaching is embedded in the context in which it was written. For example, the earlier documents are concerned with the post World War II migrations, whereas later publications reflect on political exile, the aftermath of colonialism, and displacement due to economic privation and ecological problems. Although their practical judgments on historical situations may not speak to us directly today, the fundamental criteria which govern them remain.

*Mater et Magistra*

*Mater et Magistra* (1961), issued by Pope John XXIII, recalls in the material on refugees Pius XII's 1951 radio address, known as *La Solenita*. The basis of Pius XII's affirmation of the right to mobility was that families have a right to migrate when they are not able to fulfil their purpose in their homeland.

As with all other rights and duties, however, the exercise of the right to mobility is conditioned by the requirements of the common good. John XXIII is careful to point out that the common good is not to be understood in a limited national sense, considering only the interests or goodwill of receiving countries, or indeed of the sending countries. Rather the common good is to be understood globally:

... our predecessor reminds governments, both those permitting emigration and those accepting immigrants, that they never permit anything whereby mutual and sincere understanding between states is diminished or destroyed.12
Pacem in Terris

_Pacem in Terris_ (1963), John XXIII’s final encyclical, contains a manifesto of human rights unparalleled in the documents of the social doctrine. Here we see his teaching on refugees further developed and systematically presented.

John XXIII affirms the right to emigrate as accompanying the right to internal freedom of movement. Emigration is not, however, an absolute right:

_Every human being must also have the right to freedom of movement within the confines of his own country, and, when there are just reasons for it, the right to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that one is a citizen of a particular state does not detract in any way from his membership in the human family, nor from his citizenship in the world community and his common tie with all men._13

Refugees possess all the rights that derive from personhood, because such rights are not created or granted by political authorities:

... _such exiles are persons ... all their rights as persons must be recognised, since they do not lose those rights on losing the citizenship of the states of which they are former members._14

It is the duty of states to foster and protect human rights. For John XXIII the issue of political refugees was an indication that some states were failing in this duty to foster the common good by protecting the rights and freedoms of their citizens:

_Such expatriations show that there are some political regimes which do not guarantee for individual citizens a sufficient sphere of freedom within which their souls are allowed to breathe humanly. In fact, under these regimes even the lawful existence of such a sphere of freedom is either called in question or denied. This undoubtedly is a radical inversion of the order of human society, because the reason for the existence of public authority is to promote the common good, a fundamental element of which is the recognition of that sphere of freedom and the safeguarding of it._15
Efforts to make migration less painful are commended, praise is expressed for specialised international agencies working with refugees, and the related issue of migrant workers is mentioned.

Significantly, John XXIII accepted a right to move in order to “more fittingly provide a future” for one’s family. He believed that, as far as the common good allows, states should accept such migrants.

**Gaudium et Spes**

This 1965 Vatican II document makes a strong call for respect for human dignity and equality. It goes further to assert that human dignity cannot effectively be respected unless the necessary means for a dignified life are provided:

> In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbour of absolutely every person, and of actively helping him when he comes across our path, whether he be an old person ... a foreign labourer ... a refugee, a child born of an unlawful union ... a hungry person.

Even more plainly than in *Pacem in Terris*, the international dimension of the common good and the need for international action are acknowledged. This is important for refugee issues, which are by their nature international and require international action.

> ... the universal common good needs to be intelligently pursued and more effectively achieved. Hence it is now necessary for the family of nations to create for themselves an order which corresponds to modern obligations, particularly with reference to those numerous regions still labouring under intolerable need.

> For the attainment of these goals, agencies of the international community should do their part to provide for the various necessities of men. In the field of social life this means food, health, education and employment. In certain situations which can obtain anywhere, it means the general need to promote the growth of developing nations, to attend to the hardships of refugees scattered throughout the world, or to assist migrants and their families.
Justice in the World

In 1971 the Synod Fathers noted a range of “voiceless injustices” needing urgent attention. The condition of refugees was included in this list.

The Synod drew particular attention to two closely related bases of the United Nations Convention definition of refugees: racial and ethnic persecution, particularly prominent at that stage of post-colonial adjustment. At this stage, however, no critique of the coverage of the UN definition was undertaken.

To be especially lamented is the condition of so many millions of refugees, and of every group of people suffering persecution – sometimes in institutionalized form – for racial or ethnic origin or on tribal grounds. This persecution on tribal grounds can at times take on the characteristics of genocide.22

Octogestima Adveniens

This 1971 Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI concentrates mainly on issues of development. It favours a right to migrate for purely economic reasons, and sees a link between economic and other causes of flight. In fact it implicitly places issues of migration and forced displacement on a continuum rather than drawing a sharp distinction between two categories.

The duty of solidarity evident here is based on the unity of the human family and is not to be identified as an optional act of charity. The advocacy of the range of benefits due to migrant workers and refugees and their families accentuates this point.

... it is urgently necessary for people to go beyond a narrowly nationalist attitude in their [foreign workers'] regards and to give them a charter which will assure them a right to emigrate, favour their integration, facilitate their professional advancement and give them access to decent housing where, if such is the case, their families can join them.

Linked to this category are the people who, to find work, or to escape a disaster or a hostile climate, leave their regions and find themselves without roots among other people...23
Sollicitudo Rei Socialis

By 1987, when John Paul II issued the encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, the issue of refugees was clearly enduring and not amenable to simple solutions. A deeper analysis of the roots of the problem was undertaken, placing the issue within the matrix of the politics of blocs and the North-South economic division of the world. Refugees caught in this struggle found their human needs treated as being secondary to ideological and economic considerations.

The key passage, n 24, begins with the reflection that although the arms trade is able to overcome these barriers, aid and development assistance cannot because they are used to play out the East-West conflict within North-South relations. It is also notable that the description of refugees given in this paragraph implies a much broader definition than that of the United Nations Refugee Convention:

... the consequences of this state of affairs are to be seen in the festering of a wound which typifies and reveals the imbalances and conflicts of the modern world: the millions of refugees whom war, natural calamities, persecution and discrimination of every kind have deprived of home, employment, family and homeland. The tragedy of these multitudes is reflected in the hopeless faces of men, women and children who can no longer find a home in a divided and inhospitable world ... 25

The appropriate response to this situation is outlined in passages n 38-40, which explain solidarity as a response to the moral aspect of the fact of interdependence. We are all really responsible for all, and in light of the preferential option for the poor, we are particularly responsible for refugees:

... it is above all a question of interdependence, sensed as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world, in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements, and accepted as a moral category. When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a "virtue", is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all ... 26
Centesimus Annus

Centesimus Annus, produced in 1991 after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, marks the beginning of a new phase in Catholic Social Teaching on refugee issues. As the Cold War order began to pass away, John Paul II foresaw new opportunities and challenges that would significantly affect the lives of refugees, noting that these changes underline the reality and demands of interdependence.²⁷

The document notes the violent post-war division of Europe as a cause of sizeable displacement²⁸ and acknowledges that the subsequent Cold War was not only prepared for but was actually waged in many Third World contexts. No explicit comment is made on the refugees resulting from these “wars by proxy” in this document, which focuses on the historical moment in Europe.

One of the dangers of the changed world situation was that the needs of Eastern Europe could be played off against those of the Third World. With the ideological motivation for much aid and assistance removed, moral commitment to such actions could be lacking – the poor might simply be considered a burden in this new world context:

This need (in Eastern Europe), however, must not lead to slackening of efforts to sustain and assist the countries of the Third World, which often suffer even more serious conditions of poverty and want ...

But it will be necessary above all to abandon a mentality in which the poor – as individuals and as peoples – are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced. The poor ask for a right to share in enjoying material goods and to make good use of their capacity for work, thus creating a world that is more just and prosperous for all. The advancement of the poor constitutes a great opportunity for the moral, cultural and even economic growth of all humanity.²⁹

Pope John Paul recognised, however, that more than aid and assistance is required for the recognition of the human dignity of refugees. They need to be treated respectfully rather than as mere objects of assistance:

... certain kinds of demands often call for a response which is not simply material but which is capable of perceiving the deeper human need. One thinks of the condition of refugees, immigrants, the elderly, the sick, and all those in
circumstances which call for assistance, such as drug abusers: all these people can be helped effectively only by those who offer them genuine fraternal support, in addition to the necessary care ... \(^{30}\)

Because refugees are among the most marginalised of groups, they have a special claim on our concern and assistance.\(^{31}\)

**Tertio Millennio Adveniente**

John Paul II issued *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (1994) as a plan of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. While the Apostolic Letter does not directly mention asylum seekers, refugees or displaced people, it is notable for its explanation of the Jubilee tradition, which sought to restore justice to social relations to protect the weak and the vulnerable. In the Old Testament these practices, which included the return of exiles to their homes, were to be performed every 50 years in honour of God, who had freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt:

\[
... it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family (25:10).^{32}\]

There can be little doubt that asylum seekers, refugees and displaced people are among the poorest, most marginalised and vulnerable people in the world today. The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 was clearly to be a time in which action on behalf of their dignity and rights was required:

\[
Indeed, it has to be said that a commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours, marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee.^{33}\]

**Novo Millennio Ineunte**

John Paul II issued *Novo Millennio Ineunte* in January 2001 to mark the closure of the Jubilee and the beginning of the new millennium. It calls on the faithful to “put out into the deep” to follow Jesus afresh. The end of the Jubilee is not to become a cause of complacency, but the inspiration for new initiatives to put the Jubilee into practice. Prayer and action for social justice are seen as linked rather than separate,\(^{34}\) and the faithful are called to see the face of Christ in others, especially those with whom he wished to be identified.

While the Apostolic Letter touches on a number of causes of flight and displacement, asylum seekers and refugees are indirectly addressed, insofar as Christ identified with the stranger:
If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

PART 3

World Migration Day messages

Analysis of the Pope’s annual Message for World Migration Day allows us to discern criteria for judgment and guidelines for action in relation to asylum seekers and refugees.

These messages, directed primarily to the Church community, cover all sorts of human mobility issues. Although they carry less formal authority than the social encyclicals or apostolic letters, they provide more concrete analysis of mobility issues at particular times and more detailed guidelines for action.

Specific or general, scriptural or pastoral, or examinations of world events and international responses, the messages for the period 1995-2002 vary in approach.

Large and complex issues

Many of these messages begin with an observation of the size and complexity of issues of human mobility. This is typical of the methodology of Catholic Social Teaching. Our reflections start from an observation of what is happening to people.

The world is truly becoming a global village in terms of mobility and economic and social life. People of different religions and cultures are living side by side in more countries than ever before, creating new opportunities for cultural and religious dialogue.

The messages note the negative dimensions of human mobility: the exploitation of illegal immigrants; racism and xenophobia; increasingly restrictive immigration legislation and border control; separation of families; cultural, social and religious barriers to acceptance in the host community; unemployment; lack of services; precariousness of daily life; withdrawal and introspection on the part of