

Department of International Affairs

Jubilee for Refugees

A Biblical Reflection on Refugees at the Millennium

June 1999

This document assesses the plight of refugees and the British response. It includes a theological reflection in the light of certain key biblical stories, and places the situation faced by refugees in the context of the millennium jubilee. It concludes with some points for action.

Foreword

Over the last few years our world has witnessed a massive increase in refugee movements and humanitarian tragedies. Whole nations have become victims of unjust socioeconomic and political structures, gross human rights violations and generalised violence. Semi-permanent concentrations of refugees accumulate in many parts of the world, and they risk being forgotten as new refugee movements claim priority.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are an estimated twenty seven million refugees worldwide. This figure obscures the magnitude of the refugee crisis. For example, one must add the one million displaced by the current Balkan conflict. There is also the question of the thirty million "internally displaced" who do not have protection because they have not crossed an international border!

Who could have predicted such a tragic scale of human suffering so close to the new millennium? In 1982, Pope John Paul II pleaded at the UN for international solidarity to resolve the refugee tragedy. Almost twenty years on, in the words of the Holy Father, the "wound on the side of humanity continues to grow". In fact, the Holy Father in his apostolic letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, explicitly calls for the release of people from bondage and slavery.

Indeed the Jubilee of the year 2000 offers an important opportunity for churches to proclaim a prophetic and practical response to alleviate the plight of refugees and the internally displaced. It is with this in mind that we have published this document. It provides a theological reflection on human displacement, identifies a number of "signs of hope" and offers ideas for local and national advocacy and action. We hope it inspires churches to formulate a new vision of the world based on the values of the dignity of the human person.

Among the many people who contributed to this document I particularly wish to thank Brian Davies, consultant to CAFOD, who did most of the writing. A note of thanks also to Marie Lewis who contributed to the process.

Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue

Chairman, Office for Refugee Policy
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A Psalm

By the rivers of foreign countries we sat down as refugees;
there we wept when we remembered the land of our birth.
We stopped singing our beloved songs of liberation.
Those who helped our enemies wanted us to sing;
they wanted us to entertain them: Sing us a song about the land whence you fled.

How can they expect us to entertain them with our sufferings and tears? May I never turn our struggle for freedom and peace into entertainment for those who are friends of our enemies! May I never be able to sing again if I do not remember you, if I do not think of you, O country of my birth!

Remember, Lord, what the oppressors did the day they turned us into refugees.
Remember how they kept saying: Let us destroy them completely!

(Version of Psalm 137 from Namibia)

Matthew 25

I was a stranger and you welcomed me. (Matthew 25:35)

1. The Plight of Refugees

1.1 A growing concern

We tend to think of societies as settled, made up of people who are born, live and die in the same country. Yet there has always been movement of peoples and we take notice only when it is seen in terms of 'crisis'. This happens when it is felt too many people are leaving (as in Ireland last century and much of this) or because some sections of society feel too many are arriving. What distinguishes a refugee from a migrant is the persecution and fear involved as well as the speed with which the decision to depart has to be made.

What has changed globally in the last twenty five years has been the sheer volume of those who have been forced to leave their country and seek refuge elsewhere. In 1974 there were three million refugees; in 1999 that number has increased to twenty seven million.

It is estimated that there could be at least as many people again who have been made homeless but remain within their own countries. These 'internally displaced people' are not technically refugees because they have not crossed into another country but they have similar needs and are often in even greater danger.

1.2 Why do people become refugees?

Refugees are not 'problems' which governments have to deal with. They are the victims of struggles for power in social, economic and political life, often forced from their homes by war, political and religious persecution, and human rights abuse. Others are forced to move by famine and economic disaster, sometimes themselves the result of conflict and the lust for power.

The most obvious cause of people being driven from their homes is war. For example, seventeen years of civil war in Mozambique forced 1.5 million people to flee to safety in neighbouring countries. Although the war ended in 1992 many have been unable to return because of landmines. Similarly, conflict in the former Yugoslavia and more recently in Kosovo in particular has meant people have fled in fear of their lives and found their way to various countries in Europe.

Some governments crush any opposition in order to keep their hold on power. This results in people fleeing from persecution, fear of torture and often of death. Kurdish people have suffered terrible repression in Iraq and Turkey, forcing them to seek refuge in neighbouring countries and in Europe.

Environmental disasters, like drought and flooding, often the result of desertification and deforestation, have sometimes left people with no choice but to abandon their homes and migrate to a new region where they can try to start again. The building of massive dams and extensive mining projects have inevitably involved evicting people from their homes and their land.

1.3 The result

The causes are very different but the result for many is the same: they end up as refugees in a foreign country in need of shelter and protection. In other words they seek asylum. It is clear that while their case is heard they should be treated with proper

regard for human dignity. Yet, often, having suffered great hardship and even torture in their country of origin, they are met with hostility and treated as criminals. It is tragically ironic that the poorest countries provide refuge for most of the world's refugees while rich countries are adopting more and more stringent measures to exclude them.

Jean 's story

Jean was a member of an opposition party in Zaire and received death threats forcing him to flee the country. After arrival in Britain he spent 16 months in detention before being granted refugee status.

"I arrived on 29th March 1993 and claimed asylum. I told a Frenchspeaking Immigration Officer I was claiming refuge because of political persecution in my country. After a brief interview the officer said he was sending me to a hotel and we would talk some more the next day. It turned out to be the Stansted detention centre. I spent five days in a small room with a TV and a toilet and a shared dining room.

"I did not realise I was detained till I asked the man from Group Four how I could get to see the airport radar tower. He said I could not get out. I asked why I was being detained but got no answer. After a few days I was moved to the detention centre at Heathrow and then to Harmondsworth where both men and women were held.

"The Group Four officers obliged us to get up at 6am for breakfast. Meals were compulsory: if we did not eat we had to explain why. At 9am we had to leave our rooms because they clean them. We had to be in bed by midnight. Cameras followed our every move. There were no educational facilities at any of the centres where I was held, except Haslar.

"I was moved to Haslar because I was becoming ill and it was by the sea. I learned computer studies there and English to enable me to communicate. (I only spoke French when I arrived.) I was moved twice to the hospital wing of Winchester prison where I had a cell to myself and we associated there with ordinary prisoners.

"From Haslar I was sent to Campsfield House and then back again to Harmondsworth. Finally, one evening at dinner there was a Tannoy announcement: 'Pack your bags and come to the office at once'. By 7.30pm I was out of detention."

2. The British response

2.1 Past response

Largely based on the historical relationship with her former colonies, the UK has had a tradition (often heavily qualified) of welcoming and giving refuge to those fleeing from persecution. This persecution may have taken the form of human rights abuses, political oppression or discrimination on grounds of race or religion.

The main groups to arrive in the first part of this century were Jews (initially from Eastern Europe and later from Germany), in the 1930s political refugees from Spain, and immediately following the Second World War 'displaced persons' from various European countries. In the 1970s there arrived Asians expelled from Uganda, and in the 1980s Vietnamese arrived according to a UN agreed quota system. For the former the British Government prepared a reception and settlement programme which included language classes and retraining for employment. But the latter were only grudgingly accepted.

Resettlement for these groups meant dispersal to towns where the existing settlers were few, in number, but this policy failed since the new arrivals sought accommodation where they had contacts and a support network. Until the 1980s UK attitudes to asylum seekers were fairly consistent, but with the increasing arrival of 'spontaneous' asylum seekers in the 1990s the UK attitude changed to one of containment and restriction.

2.2 Current position

The global escalation in the numbers of refugees, especially in the last ten years, has resulted in successive legislation: the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act, the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act, and now the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Bill which is likely to be enacted in the autumn.

The 1996 Act introduced a devastating restriction in right to benefit. Those applying for asylum 'in country' (i.e. after leaving the point of entry) were deemed to have entered on false pretences and therefore were not eligible for benefits. The courts intervened in October 1996 to oblige local authorities to provide assistance to destitute asylum seekers under the 1948 National Assistance Act. Since this support is minimal, it has fallen to the voluntary sector especially faith communities to provide additional services. This has been a very punitive piece of legislation denying asylum seekers their rights and robbing them of their dignity.

Although the UK is adamant about retaining border controls it has been party to the harmonisation of EU asylum policies which have resulted in even more restrictions. The aim is quite simply to make it more difficult for asylum seekers to enter Europe for example, by penalising those who carry passengers without proper documents; through inflexible determination procedures; by a restrictive interpretation of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention; and by removal to 'safe' third countries.

2.3 Non-Governmental response

Refugee agencies and community groups, human rights organisations, churches, lawyers, trade unions and others have campaigned vigorously against restrictive legislation, at the same time pressing for a fair and positive asylum policy. They have published recommendations for a fairer asylum system and participated in the Government consultative process.

2.4 1999 Immigration and Asylum Bill

There is widespread disappointment and concern about such proposals as:

- the continuation of support in kind (cashless voucher system) rather than returning to benefits;
- the dispersal of asylum seekers throughout the country to places where there may be little social, medical and legal support;
- the increased power of arrest and seizure given to Immigration Officers without an independent body to oversee these powers;
- the continued use of detention with no time limit and only limited rights to bail.

The message remains the same as throughout the 1990s "not wanted here". In spite of claims to establish an ethical foreign policy, there is little indication of policies which might address asylum as a global issue requiring international solidarity.

3. Theological Reflection

3.1 Human response

Reflection on the plight of refugees from a faith perspective builds on the choice we each have when faced with another person. Fundamentally we can respond to the other either as gift or as threat, and the habitual responses we make do much to establish our selfunderstanding and identity. We can welcome a meeting with a new person as an opportunity for establishing how much we have in common and a valuing of differences that can result in mutual growth. Or because they may not be the same as we are, we can regard the new person with fear, to be approached defensively or even aggressively. When two people meet for the first time it is often possible to detect both of these attitudes at work.

Although group responses to strangers and foreigners are much more complex, they contain the same fundamental attitudes of gift and threat. The resulting social behaviour may involve, on the one hand, an outgoing welcome that celebrates the enrichment that comes from sharing with other cultures, together with the desire to extend care and protection to them. On the other hand, a society may exaggerate the differences and emphasise its own identity by disparaging other cultures and seeking to expel those who are perceived as 'aliens'.

3.2 Neighbours or strangers

This same ambiguity of approach is to be found in the biblical tradition. Alongside the command to love God, the command that "you must love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) is given the highest status by Jesus. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). The teaching seems crystal clear yet the understanding of 'neighbour' seems to vary.

The Exodus story is of a people in search of food and land who eventually, after a time of trial, acquire through conquest a homeland that is then perceived as a gift of God. They are to keep their side of the special relationship with God by keeping his commandments. But there is a repeated failure on the part of the Israelites to understand the implications. They tend to see their story as leading to privilege without responsibility, and love of neighbour tends to be confined to their own people.

The law regarding sabbatical remission of debt, for example, explicitly excludes foreigners. "Every seventh year you shall grant remission of debts. ... You may exact a claim of a foreigner but not of a neighbour who is a member of your own community" (Deuteronomy 15:13). Similarly, slaves should be released in the Jubilee Year, but not if they are foreigners. "As for the slaves you may have from the nations around you or from the aliens living among you ... these you may keep as a possession. ... But not your fellow Israelites" (Leviticus 25:44-45).

Even the passage of Isaiah chosen by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth at the beginning of his public ministry for his proclamation of the good news to the poor (Luke 4:18-19), goes on to remind God's people that foreigners will always be there to do the work: "Strangers will be there to feed your flocks, foreigners as your ploughmen and vinedressers" (Isaiah 61:5). To the extent that the Hebrew scriptures present a universal message, it is mainly about other tribes and peoples coming to worship Yahweh, the God of Israel.

At the same time, side by side with this exclusive message, the story is of a people who are being gradually transformed as they are drawn reluctantly to a wider, more inclusive understanding of neighbour. While speaking to Israel in terms they can accept, the

prophets are striving beyond a tribal god to an understanding that begins to embrace the rest of humanity.

So we need to be aware of another tradition that gives a special place to the stranger. After all, were the Israelites not once in this position themselves? "You must not oppress the stranger; you know how the stranger feels, for you were strangers in Egypt" (Exodus 23:9). It follows that "you shall have one law for the stranger and for the citizen" (Leviticus 24:22). If we look carefully, we can find a message of universal justice. "The Lord your God is God of gods, the great God, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:17-18).

Of course, it is not just the Israelites who have had a restricted interpretation of neighbour. The stronger our sense of belonging to a Christian community the greater the risk of seeing others as outsiders and of excluding them.

3.3 Some key stories

Along with widows, orphans and slaves, strangers are frequently featured in scripture as illustrations of God's special love and care for the poor and excluded. It will be useful to examine a number of particular stories that help to fill out what should be the Christian attitude to strangers and hence to refugees.

a) Abraham's hospitality

The first historical figures in the Bible are Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is presented as a great unifying figure "in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). He provides us with a story showing how the hospitality he offered to complete strangers goes together with God's blessing:

'As Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day, he looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, 'My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on since you have come to your servant.'

(Genesis 18:15)

The respectful greeting and welcome is followed by lavish hospitality. The strangers are served under the shade of the trees, not just with the best bread, but with specially prepared meat, and curds and milk. Before departing, they promise that Sarah will give birth to a son. Till then it seemed quite impossible that the often repeated blessing of descendants as numerous as "the stars in the sky" could come about.

The story is written so as to see in the strangers messengers from God, or angels. Indeed, the incident has been made familiar through Rublev's icon depicting the three figures, seated in shared community around a table, as a representation of the Trinity. But, long before anyone saw the story as foreshadowing the Trinity, it was a story of hospitality given to strangers. This was how the writer of the letter to the Hebrews saw it: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

Anyone who has experienced the overwhelming hospitality given to strangers by families in most parts of the Third World will recognise the story as authentic. Whatever their

poverty, it is part of their cultural tradition to give the very best they have. On the whole, regrettably, we do not have the same tradition in the rich world.

b) Jesus in the synagogue

Because it speaks so clearly of the liberation of the poor, the opening of Jesus' public ministry in Luke's Gospel is probably the most quoted passage of scripture:

"When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

'And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth."

(Luke 4:16-22; quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

The important thing to know is that "the year of the Lord's favour", according to most scholars, is a reference to the Jubilee Year. Jesus was, therefore, in the way Luke presents this story at the beginning of his Gospel, proclaiming the final Jubilee with all the messianic overtones of the Isaiah text. We should then notice that Jesus' listeners apparently had no problem with this idea: indeed, they seem initially to have rated the sermon very highly. Yet, within a few verses of the above passage, that same synagogue congregation "was filled with rage" and tried to "hurl him off the top of a cliff". Something quite dramatic must have happened in those intervening verses.

As we have seen already, the Jubilee Law regarding debt and slavery strictly applied only to fellow Israelites: the congregation it seems had no difficulty accepting that the text was being fulfilled in that sense. But Jesus wanted to lead them further: he reminded them of two particular stories to be found in 1 and 2 Kings stories about Elijah and Elisha which make clear that God's favour is for others as well, and not just for their own people. Reconciliation with God, it seems, and sharing in Jubilee, is meant for absolutely everyone. Jesus' listeners found such an interpretation altogether too much for them: that is why they tried to do away with him.

We cannot celebrate the universal reconciliation of Jesus' Jubilee, if at the same time we restrict reconciliation to our own people, and exclude strangers and refugees.

c) Sheep and goats

Just before his account of the Passion, Matthew presents a number of Jesus' parables of the kingdom. The best known, and at the same time the most challenging of these, is that of the Last Judgement:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me

food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

(Matthew 25:31-36)

In the most direct way possible Jesus equates what we do to the least of his family as done to him (Matthew 25:40). It does not matter whether we realise who it is we are caring for; what matters is whether we do it.

This is the strongest of any text about strangers. Quite simply, Jesus identifies with strangers with all the background this word has in the Hebrew scriptures. We should also bear in mind that Jesus and his family knew first hand from the flight into Egypt what it was to be a refugee.

When we welcome refugees we welcome him; when we reject them we reject him, whether we realise what we are doing or not.

First the stranger is welcomed and invited to a meal. Then the scenario changes: the guest becomes the host who is recognised as Jesus while they were eating at table. It is as if we are being shown how we should understand, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me".

There is, of course, further meaning in this story. For us, as for the disciples, "Jesus is made known in the breaking of bread" (Luke 24:35). When we celebrate the Eucharist an act of sharing and hospitality we meet Jesus the breadbreaker, the man for others. How can we celebrate the Eucharist and at the same time exclude the stranger or refugee?

3.4 The Church 's social teaching

The plight of refugees has been a recurring concern in social teaching over the years. The basis of this teaching has always been the dignity of the human person made in the image of God. Alongside this fundamental value are the general principles of the common good (including special regard for the most vulnerable) and solidarity, with a particular emphasis for refugees on family unity and the right to work.

Of course, the Church takes a global, not a narrowly nationalistic view of migration. She, therefore, puts a high priority on the generous and proper treatment of all migrants and refugees, no matter who they are, where they are, or how they have arrived.

The following brief examples give an indication of the strength of the teaching.

a) Pope John XXIII insisted on a family's right to migrate as part of his general presentation of human rights on which he built his plea for world peace:
"Every human being has the right of freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of their own state. When there are just reasons in favour of it, they must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that they are citizens of a particular state does not deprive them of membership of the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society the common worldwide human fellowship.

"The deep feelings of paternal love for all of humanity which God has implanted in our heart make it impossible for us to view without bitter anguish of spirit the plight of those who for political reasons have been exiled from their own homelands. There are a great

number of such refugees at the present time, and many are the sufferings the incredible sufferings ~ to which they are constantly exposed."

(Pacem in Terris 1963, nn. 25, 103)

b) Reflecting on the needs of migrants, Pope Paul VI drew attention to:

"the people who, to find work, or to escape a disaster or a hostile climate, leave their regions and find themselves among other people. It is everyone ~ duty, but especially that of Christians, to work with energy for the establishment of universal brotherhood the universal basis for authentic justice and the condition for enduring peace."

(Octogesima Adveniens 1971, n. 17)

c) According to Pope John Paul II the facts are plain for all to see. He refers to:

"the open wound of 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."

(Sollicitudo Rei Socialis 1987, n. 24)

"The Church, present in every clime, is not identified with any particular race or culture since, as the Epistle to Diognetus recalls, Christians 'live in their homeland, but as guests; as citizens they participate in all things, but are detached from all things as strangers. Every foreign country is a homeland to them and every homeland a foreign country. ... They dwell on earth but are citizens of heaven.'"

(Message for World Migration Day 1999)

4. Jubilee for Refugees

4.1 Celebrating jubilees

We need to bear in mind that in this country we are used to celebrating all sorts of jubilees like anniversaries of birthdays and weddings and ordinations. Fifty years of someone's life, of being married, or of being a priest, represent a considerable amount of human experience that is worth celebrating with family and friends. It is usually an opportunity to stand back for a moment from the present in order to reflect on the past, and express hopes for the future. The point is that 'jubilee' is deeply embedded in our culture, even if it is not widely appreciated that the whole idea has its origins in the Old Testament.

Against this background, Pope John Paul II reminds us that the millennium is 'a jubilee of jubilees', celebrating a unique cosmic event the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Even though we do not know the exact date, we have for centuries been using a calendar that starts with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Recognising immediately the challenge of the millennium, and the teaching opportunity for the Church, the Pope has referred to it in every one of the thirteen encyclicals he has written to date. In the special letter he wrote for the millennium (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente* 1994) he set out a detailed programme of preparation in order to reclaim the event and celebrate properly 2000 years of the reign of Christ.

4.2 The biblical basis of jubilee

According to Leviticus 25, Holy Years were to be celebrated every seven years (Sabbatical) and every fifty years (Jubilee). They involved restoring land, remitting debts and freeing slaves, since these represented the most significant ways in which the gap between rich and poor had increased. Those who had accumulated more were to give it back in observance of the 'Holiness Code' set out in Leviticus. Both sorts of Holy Year were really aimed at restoring social equality throughout Israel, the Jubilee being, in effect, a super Sabbatical every seventh time round. The land, which really belonged to God anyway, had to be restored to its original occupier on the basis that the original distribution between the tribes of Israel had been fair. Debts (not just the interest) were simply to be forgiven. And Israelites could not remain in slavery for more than a limited period since God had redeemed them for himself in liberating them from Egypt.

Leviticus 25 is part of the 'Holiness Code' (chapters 17-26), the set of laws to which Israel commits itself to show it belongs to Yahweh and is therefore a holy people. These laws are linked with the liturgy of the Day of Atonement, which is set out in cultic detail in Leviticus 16. So during the great feast of Yom Kippur (Atonement) the public, structural sin of Israel is identified and confessed, a Jubilee Year is inaugurated, and new relationships of equality made possible. The key point for us is that we are not dealing here with any 'cheap' reconciliation which pretends that all will be well if we but pray for God's forgiveness while leaving the power relationships as they were. The Day of Atonement (or Reconciliation) involves the naming of sin linked, in the Holiness Code, with specific practical action to deal with the systems responsible all expressed in a symbolic liturgy. The rite of the scapegoat, far from dodging responsibility and placing blame on an innocent party, was a way of owning up to social sin and showing its removal. Reconciliation with God, of course, still finally depends on change of heart and commitment to a new code of behaviour.

As we have already seen, the idea of Jubilee was given new significance by Jesus. He made it clear that he was sent "to bring good news to the poor" and "to proclaim the Lord's year of favour" (Luke 4:16-21). Since "the Lord's year of favour" is another way of describing the Jubilee Year, Jesus is identifying himself in Luke's presentation as the Messiah who ushers in the Jubilee not just as an anniversary but as a lasting celebration

of the Lord's favour. It is he who takes away our sins (John 1:29) and reconciles us with the father (Colossians 1: 1920).

4.3 Jubilee for refugees

The scriptures, then, provide us with a model In order to be reconciled with God, we need as a community to identify the structural sins o our society, repent of our complicity in them but at the same time bring about a change in the system so that the injustice is not perpetuated. Our task, as the Second Vatican Council put it, is "to discern the signs of the times". This means we have to interpret "land, debt and slavery", as identified in Leviticus, in terms of the reality of today's world.

In his remarkable letter for the millennium, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Pope John Paul II says (n. 5 1):

"If we recall that Jesus came to 'preach the good news to the poor', how can we fail to lay greater emphasis on the Church 's preferential option for the poor and the outcast? 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."

This is why there are millennium campaigns organised by CAFOD on international debt and the slavery of working conditions implicit in much of Third World trade. For the majority of the world's people, perhaps the most fundamental concern is that they have sufficient land to provide a livelihood for their family. In our society we must broaden our understanding to include refugees and the homeless, both of whom have a right to somewhere they can call home. The Pope has described the situation of refugees as "perhaps the greatest of all the human tragedies of our time" (Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity 1992).

A specific millennium campaign is therefore a jubilee for refugees so that they, too, can be part of the celebration, and share freedom with the rest of us. What sort of a celebration is it going to be if they continue to be excluded?

5. Refugee Action for the Millennium

Immigration and Asylum Bill

Encourage people to write to their MP expressing concern that the Bill will adversely affect asylum seekers as indicated above. (For information about this campaign contact the Office for Refugee Policy of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, the Churches' Commission for Racial Justice, or the Refugee Council.)

Act of witness

As a sign of how we could continue, all are encouraged to welcome the stranger asylum seeker, refugee, traveller, homeless person or member of a minority community into their home some time around the beginning of the new millennium or Pentecost in the year 2000. The candles being lit for the millennium from CTE could be given this added significance, using the Celtic Blessing given below. (More information from the Justice and Peace Jubilee Office or from your Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission.)

Refugee Week, November 1999

A week of activities celebrating the talents of refugees. (For more information contact Refaid charity arm of the UNHCR)

World Migration Day, 3rd December

Information from Office for Refugee Policy, Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Celtic Blessing

May the blessing of light be on you, light without and light within.

May the blessed sunlight shine upon you and warn your heart till it glows like a great fire, and strangers may warm themselves as well as friends.

And may the light shine out of the eyes of you, like a candle set in the window of a house, bidding the wanderer to come in out of the storm.

May you ever have a kindly greeting for people as you're going along the roads.

And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly.

Amen.

Addresses

For further information and resources:

Office for Refugee Policy
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 39 Eccleston Square, LONDON SW1V
1 BX
Tel: 0207 834 0522

The Refugee Council
3 Bondway, LONDON SW8 1SJ
Tel: 0207 820 3000

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
21st Floor, Millbank Tower, 21-24 Millbank, LONDON SW1P 1QP
Tel: 0207 828 9191 (Refaid 0207 932 1019)

CAFOD (Catholic Fund for Overseas Development)
Romero Close, Stockwell Road, LONDON SW9 9TY
Tel: 0207 733 7900

Churches Commission for Racial Justice
Inter-Church House, 35-41 Lower Marsh, LONDON SE1 7RL
Tel: 0207 620 4444

Justice and Peace Jubilee Office
Diocesan Centre, Mornington Crescent, Mackworth, DERBY DE22 4BD