

Mission Theology Advisory Group (MTAG)

Mission, Migrants and Refugees



Photo: Freedom House

A Syrian refugee girl looks out from behind the fence at Yayladagi refugee camp in Hatay province near the Turkish-Syrian border

Contents:

- Theological reflection on mission, migrants and refugees
 - Introduction
 - What kind of world does God want?
 - We are all human beings loved by God
 - The myth of utopia and the longing for a future
 - Accepting bad news
 - The future of migrants and refugees
 - What can Christians and churches do?
- Engaging with the Bible; engaging with stories
- Prayers, planning for the future.

Introduction

It seems that everyone is talking about the migrant and refugee crisis. Over recent weeks and months we have seen thousands of Syrians, Afghans, Eritreans, Somalians, Nigerians and many others fleeing war, violence and persecution. We have seen them make their way to Europe in the hope of security and better lives. We have seen appalling news reports of their desperate and sometimes fatal efforts to reach European countries and have heard about the political fallout as politicians ponder how to respond. We have heard the Archbishop of Canterbury call on churches to provide sanctuary,¹ and the Pope call on the faithful to follow his example and take in refugees.² Some Christian commentators have led a clarion call to take in every single displaced person;³ others have claimed that Christian faith is contributing to the problem.⁴

This reflection is not about what is happening now. Rather, having heard David Cameron's pledge to take in more of the most vulnerable migrants, this resource is intended to stimulate thinking and reflection about what happens *in the long term* to those people who come to live in the UK. What will happen to them when the emotions die down and the news switches to other concerns? The future of today's migrants and refugees raises an urgent question about how the Church's mission is shaped to respond to those to whom we pledge our loving service. Yes, we care today, because the pictures are so awful; why should we care tomorrow?

The missionary purpose of the Church is inextricably linked to the *missio Dei*, God's purpose for the world. The *missio Dei* is bound up with the long term future of human beings, the creation of conditions for human freedom and flourishing which lead to 'life abundant' (John 10.10). So the mission perspective requires us to ask questions about the 'other side' of the current crisis when the refugees have dropped out of sight of public attention. It is an important matter of mission that we come to a strategic focus on the better life that migrants and refugees hope for. So we have to ask some practical and theological questions and these are explored below, along with suggestions for appropriate and sustainable action. Such questions include:

- **What does God want for a world facing a crisis like this? What kind of *future* does God want for victims of war and violence?**
- **How can Christians provide a narrative in public space which recovers refugees and migrants as human beings, highlighting their stories, and addressing their long-term needs and futures?**
- **What fears and concerns do people living in this country have about migrants and refugees and how can those be addressed seriously?**
- **What long term issues do migrants and refugees have which need our ongoing help and support?**

¹ Archbishop of Canterbury, 3rd September 2015,

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5606/archbishop-of-canterbury-on-the-migrant-crisis>

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/pope-francis-promises-to-take-in-two-refugee-families-and-urges-others-to-follow-his-example-10488748.html>

³ Fraser, G., (2015) 'Christian politicians won't say it, but the Bible is clear: let the refugees in, every last one', <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2015/sep/04/christian-politicians-wont-say-it-but-the-bible-is-clear-let-the-refugees-in-every-last-one>

⁴ Parris, M., 'Millions of us honestly don't know what our duty is to migrants – and Christianity doesn't help' Spectator, 5th September 2015, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/columnists/matthew-parris/9622502/millions-of-us-honestly-dont-know-what-our-duty-is-to-migrants-and-christianity-doesnt-help/>

Looking through this mission theological lens, we can develop what the Bishop of Leeds has recently called a 'compassionate imagination'.⁵ Imagination is needed to respond to a situation for which European politics has no long term plan. It is no solution to receive refugees into communities which fear and hate them and want to see them 'go home'. We have to understand *why* we should care and why we should actively choose to be vehicles of hospitality and welcome as well as then looking into the practical matters of how Christians and churches can help long term. Pope Francis has also called for a transition from a 'culture of rejection' to a 'culture of encounter and acceptance'.⁶ What would such a culture look like and how would we recognise it? Why should we want peace and reconciliation in countries we know little about and may never visit, and why should we work for global stability and co-operation between nations and people-groups?

Canon J John, writing on his blog, argues that compassion needs ongoing involvement, intelligence, analysis, and integrity.⁷ Compassion should not spring exclusively from tear-jerking pictures but be fed into wise and effective decision-making; the head as well as the heart.

Such issues are both theological and strategic because they are related to our view of what God's kingdom might look like. They challenge us to think deeply about whether as Christians we only pay lip service to the idea of mission or are prepared to make the fruits of mission happen. Is God's kingdom bound by human definitions of nationhood? What does being neighbours imply in a globalised world? What kind of world are we, as Christians, being called to work towards?

What kind of world does God want?

Isaiah 65.17-25 sets out the kind of world which encourages and sustains human flourishing: a living context of peace, safety, stability; the ability to work and provide for individuals, families and communities; shelter, health and wellbeing and some measure of prosperity enabling people to build for a future. In such a world, people are much freer from fear and uncertainty; they have time to reflect on who they are as human beings in relation to God and what they want the future to contain. Jesus puts it more succinctly 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10.10 as above).

*'Ahmed, from Damascus, has been waiting at Keleti station for three days after journeying overland for more than three weeks through Turkey, Greece, Macedonia and Serbia. He says he is looking for two things: physical safety, and the ability to work and rebuild his life. Once in Western Europe, Ahmed (who asked that this real name not be used) hopes to bring his family over from Syria. "We have escaped death four times," he says. "Our children are scared all the time. Even if you close a door loudly you can see the fear in their eyes."'*⁸

⁵ Baines, N., 'Refugee crisis in Europe' 3rd September 2015,

<https://nickbaines.wordpress.com/2015/09/03/refugee-crisis-in-europe/>

⁶ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html

⁷ <http://www.canonjohn.com/blog/2015/09/140/heart-breaking-dilemma>

⁸ 'Migrants are thronging Budapest's train station' 2nd September 2015,

<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21663176-germany-beckons-hungary-turnstiles-have-swung-shut-migrants-are-thronging-budapests-train>

We can see immediately that the lives of the migrants and refugees like Ahmed are not remotely like the Isaiah vision. A Save the Children video which went viral on social media reflected this by showing a western child celebrating a birthday with her family and playing happily and securely with her toys, followed by images of the same child running in fear from explosions, and making her way, exhausted, into an uncertain world, clinging to a bedraggled toy as to the remnants of her life.⁹

The refugees from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Syria, have often left because there is no peace or security in the towns they have fled and may have been driven out because of war or persecution or violence against them. Some of these are Christians fleeing from groups such as IS or the Taliban. Displaced people fleeing from violence have no opportunities to provide for their families; they become entirely reliant on those who will shelter them and give them the means of movement. They are extraordinarily vulnerable when removed from the places and people they know. They often fall victim to evil people whose only interest is to rob them and exploit them, traffickers who take everything they have and abandon them, often to terrible deaths.

It is clear then that these conditions are not what God desires for human beings. Scripture indeed is littered with the stories of displaced and persecuted people and makes it clear that God goes with them. Jesus and his parents were refugees fleeing persecution when they went to Egypt. The conditions that surround the refugees, which have broken their lives, are therefore conditions of sin, offence against God. This is why the five marks of mission¹⁰ include loving service towards others, the need to challenge unjust structures of society, and the need to work for peace and reconciliation. The marks of mission are not general guidelines for Christian living but robust challenges to see human life changed for the better, permanently. Moreover, the marks of mission are not just about responding to lives as they are lived now; we have a responsibility as Christians carrying God's intentions into the world to address every part of their lives – the violence and ruin of their past in the countries they have left, their needs now as migrants and refugees, their future lives in new and different places, and their needs to reconnect with other family members, their culture, their history and their origins.

We are all human beings loved by God

An initial task, then, is to see and respond to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as human beings, loved by God and desired by God to have settled, fruitful lives. This sounds obvious and simple, but it is not. News reports give conflicting views of migrants, from the heart-breaking pictures of drowned children on the one hand, to groups of people ('mobs') chanting, and pictures of people cutting fences and trying to board lorries on the other. People stuck on Eurostar trains offer stories of being frightened by migrants banging on windows and trying to open the doors of trains.

French passenger Frederic Bruel told the newspaper: 'Little by little the situation deteriorated. The train ended up running out of batteries, so there was no air conditioning, and then after two more hours no more communication as the audio system was out of service. We then spent an unbelievable amount of time in the dark, in an air that was hard to breath.'(sic) 'I saw people who were finding it hard not to totally go off the rails. Some people started screaming and threatening to smash the windows. It must have been 35C in there. Those on board claimed that Eurostar staff were scared that that if they opened

⁹ Save the Children video online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBQ-1oHfimQ>

¹⁰ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx>

the doors, the migrants might attempt to board the train - potentially putting the safety of those on board at risk.

Passenger Daniel Norman took to social media to complain about the conditions on board the train, telling Eurostar: 'You have disgraced yourself today. You left nearly 1000 people terrified and alone' ¹¹

This fear must be taken seriously and addressed. It is perhaps not unrelated to the heightened news coverage about the centenary of the First World War and reactivated fears of invasion, incursion and occupation by people who are 'other'. David Cameron has been criticised for using the language of 'swarms'¹² but there have also been news reports of people in Kent complaining that their own lives are being ruined by the knock-on effects of Operation Stack and limitations on their own movements.¹³ If God desires security, peace and ability for *everyone* to flourish there is an urgent need to address not only language about migrants which respects their humanity¹⁴ but also the fears that stop people seeing them as fellow human beings.¹⁵ News footage of migrants trying to break through barriers, break into vehicles, or climbing fences in the dark reinforce ideas of invasion and aggression and distract from the stories and desperation that force them to do this. Similarly, people worry about what accepting migrants will mean for their own standards of living and ability to flourish and, in the absence of information, assume that it means more pressure on services, more crime, and an increased burden on the taxpayer. Implicitly, many people begin to believe that the acceptance of migrants means that the Isaiah vision is being diluted for *them* and for their children. Giles Fraser has said, 'why not all of them? Surely that's the biblical answer to the "how many can we take?" question. Every single last one. Let's dig up the greenbelt, create new cities, turn our Downton Abbeys into flats and church halls into temporary dormitories, and reclaim all those empty penthouses being used as nothing more than investment vehicles.'¹⁶ Yet this call ignores criticisms that are made about philosophical proposals for utopia - the economic costs of altruism are not infinitely sustainable.¹⁷ In the end, the sources which make it possible for poor and disadvantaged people to be sustained may collapse under the burden, leaving them stranded further down the line when their plight has been forgotten about. It matters that we act now, but we have also to act as good and honest stewards of those people's futures, so that they may also steward ours.

Efforts have been made by Christians already to portray migrants as people rather than 'swarms'. Christians have travelled to Calais for example, to meet the migrants living in the 'Jungle' as the

¹¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3219104/Misery-Eurostar-passengers-migrants-climb-roof-186mph-London-bound-train-Calais.html>

¹² 'David Cameron says he did not dehumanise migrants with 'swarms' comment' The Independent, 15th August 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/david-cameron-says-he-did-not-dehumanise-migrants-with-swarms-comment-10456984.html>

¹³ 'How Operation Stack is affecting UK tourism', The Guardian, 29th July 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jul/29/how-operation-stack-is-affecting-uk-tourism>

¹⁴ See <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/a-statement-on-the-situation-in-calais/>

¹⁵ There has been a shift in language from 'migrants' to 'refugees' but this is problematic where people assume either that 'refugees' are somehow more deserving, or that 'migrants' are the troublemakers. The BBC, for example, has needed to clarify its use of terms. MTAG uses the terms merely to distinguish motivation.

¹⁶ Fraser, G., (2015) 'Christian politicians won't say it, but the Bible is clear: let the refugees in, every last one', <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2015/sep/04/christian-politicians-wont-say-it-but-the-bible-is-clear-let-the-refugees-in-every-last-one>

¹⁷ See for example, Robert Peston discussing the economic costs and benefits of taking migrants: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-34172729>

encampment at Calais is called, to hear their stories, visit their church and to pray with them and offer solidarity.

For example, Juliet Kilpin, a member of MTAG, organised a trip to visit the Calais migrants, taking clothes and food and donations to help charities working with them there. 17 year old Matt, who went on the trip, reported his experience of talking to one of the migrants:

*'Matt said: "I spoke to one man called Eyob, he was 36 and had travelled from Ethiopia to get to Calais, either by walking or by bus. He had not spoken to his family for four months. I asked if he would like to bring his family with him, but he said no. He had left in search of a better life and to provide to his family, but after what he's gone through, and now being in the camp, he said he didn't want to put his family through that. He had studied English and biology in Ethiopia and wanted to study biology in England... I asked Eyob quite bluntly about the British benefits system. He was clueless. He had no idea about the benefits system. He wanted to come to England because he wanted to learn and to work.'*¹⁸

Matt found that far from wanting to exploit the UK's benefit system, the migrant he spoke to was a man with a name and a family who was putting their needs and interests first. This matters. Migrants and refugees are people with names, histories, needs and desires and this makes us neighbours with common interests. For as long as the migrants are unnamed and faceless, they become less human to us, and therefore threatening. Stories of encounter and mutual learning are therefore important in talking about migrants. It is easier to connect with Eyob, or with the 18 year old who told a reporter he had carried and pushed his grandmother in a wheelchair from Afghanistan to Hungary, than with a 'mob' or a 'swarm' of people. It is a matter of mission imperative that we not only counter a discourse that turns migrants into enemies, but also one which sentimentalises them and generates a short-lived compassion. We are all descended from migrants and our faith comes from the stories of migrants. Their histories are bound up with ours. Their stories matter in conjunction with ours, our stories of hope, compassion, struggle and confusion about the way the world is going. We are neighbours to each other. So what Matt has done makes a huge difference in creating perception and context for Christian action. But we can all be part of generating a proper discourse that enables others to engage effectively. Even the officers doing the job of containing and bringing back Calais migrants when they breach the security measures can say 'It makes you think, this job. How can you judge a guy who has nothing, who is fleeing war and just wants a life for his family?'¹⁹ People who are so desperate to flee that they will entrust their entire future to a leaking boat are examples of the man fallen among thieves. Jesus asks us today: who is their neighbour? Who will bind their wounds and carry them to a place of safety and pay for their rehabilitation? The man fallen among thieves did not recover overnight.

The myth of utopia and the longing for a future

Yet the story which Eyob tells is not universally true. Many migrants do believe that the UK is a source of the Isaiah vision, 'a land of milk and honey', instantly available to them. Some have been sold a utopian vision only to be disillusioned if they do make it to the UK. Some believe that they will be

¹⁸ 'Southend volunteers visit Calais to hear migrants' stories' Southend Echo, 28th August 2015, http://www.echo-news.co.uk/news/13631364.Southend_volunteers_visit_Calais_to_hear_migrants_stories/

¹⁹ 'Migrants in Calais Desperately Rush the Channel Tunnel to England, Night After Night' <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/31/world/europe/migrants-wait-in-calais-for-a-chance-to-cross-the-channel.html? r=0>

immediately given a house, money, and useful work. Sometimes traffickers peddle a myth of earthly paradise in order to persuade migrants to part with all they have. The fact that some have been sold this myth is then easily translated into the idea that such people are 'scroungers' ready to exploit the UK and its people. For instance, Hamzei, from Afghanistan, told the BBC: 'I heard good news about England. They give you a house and some money to spend and live. And then they give them the opportunity to study, to have a good life.'²⁰ Hamzei needs more than the 'good news' of material things; he needs the good news of welcome, friendship and community.

Yet such people may fall for the traffickers' deceit because it promises them what they have lost – a home, the chance to work and earn to support their family, to learn and to enjoy being human. In other words, what they imagine the UK can offer is precisely the Isaiah vision, the kingdom reality, the idea of heaven on earth, free from fear, pain and suffering. If, as Christians, we believe that our task is to respond to God's mission and fulfil God's intentions for human beings then it is part of our task to make our own society one in which those desires can be realised, not just for migrants and refugees, but for everyone. Are we doing this effectively? Do we hold our successive governments accountable for realising this vision? Or is it that it takes something like the migrant crisis currently in progress for us to speak and act and set our sights on long term change and betterment for everyone?

Yet there are other layers of complexity because while many, perhaps most, of the migrants have only this ambition for security and a better life, we cannot pretend that the perception of migrants is not also tarnished by the fact that there *are* some migrants and especially traffickers who enter the country and become engaged in criminal activity or seek to live solely through the black economy. Both migrants and refugees have motivations to leave their places of origin, but they also may make very different choices about where to go and what to do. That is why each country requires issues of legality, legitimacy and process in order to understand who is arriving and what they need. Yet when foreign criminal gangs are reported or UK citizens suffer as a result of their crimes, their nationalities may become associated with incursion and exploitation of the UK. So in establishing migrants and refugees as human beings under God, we have to be sure that we do not allow prejudice or fear to pre-judge their motives, intentions and desires because of their ethnic origin or religion, and we may need a determined counter-narrative to fears about them in public space. Some, like Eyob, want only new opportunity for their family, some want safety and freedom from fear and persecution, some believe in the UK as utopia. Such migrants are in fact most often the targets of those others who want to prey on the vulnerable, join the black economy or engage in crime. MTAG discovered from conversations in various neighbourhoods that some Christians are confused and torn by this and some speak simultaneously of compassion for refugees and migrants and also of feeling threatened and concerned by them (see Terry's story, below).

So we have to be clear about what narratives are around in our own communities and churches. When we think about the different intentions of people we cannot speak about helping migrants without condemning those who would prey on them; we cannot take in and provide for migrants without being clear that we condemn those who would seek only to hurt others and use the means of migration for evildoing or avoiding justice. MTAG has produced a paper and resources on human trafficking and modern slavery which examines these issues in more detail.²¹

²⁰ 'Would Calais migrants really be better off in the UK?' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-33268521>

²¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1982544/human%20trafficking%20and%20modern-day%20slavery.pdf>

Accepting bad news

Once migrants came to the UK with the good news of the gospel. Now migrants come with the bad news of war, terror and persecution. Our task then is to receive this bad news for what it is, evidence of the damage being done to the world, and to speak about it and act to change it. For example, Angelina Jolie-Pitt has recently spoken out against the use of rape as a weapon to terrorise women caught up in conflicts.²² This is not an easy subject for many people to approach or even to think about. Yet some refugee women will carry that bad news and need help to tell that traumatic story, impossible when the asylum process may mean speaking in a room full of strange men. Such women often keep silent and end up losing their asylum claims. We also cannot pretend that the suffering of migrants and refugees ends when they receive asylum. Many of them will have endured not only appalling experiences of death, torture and terror in their own countries but frightening and desperate journeys as well. Such trauma cannot be wiped out by merely receiving them; there needs to be both medical and ongoing pastoral care for survivors. Their stories may be exceptionally difficult to hear, not least because they are often a challenge to faith, but we have to find ways of accepting and absorbing bad news as part of God's reconciling work in mission. This is a long term task requiring practical and spiritual resources. MTAG has helpful resources available through its group resources for the group's book *Unreconciled?* (See www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/mission/mission-theology.aspx for more information.)

The future of migrants and refugees

Hung Trung Pham SJ, a Vietnamese immigrant to the United States, has helpfully highlighted a number of issues which arise as migrants and refugees try to make a future for themselves in new countries.²³ First, individuals struggle with their own sense of identity and purpose. He writes that this struggle is particularly acute as they try to accommodate their experiences into their unfolding spiritual journey. He writes that for him, his struggle became intertwined with the experiences in the Bible of Joseph and that the story of Joseph can be for us a useful way of thinking about and beginning to understand what it is like to start a different life while trying to make sense of the conditions which have necessitated the transition. This leads to what he calls 'segmented assimilation' dependent on social status from the past and the mode of reception in the host country. Both are critical in finding out what 'place' is available to migrants. He says too that migrants experience a sense of being in the society but not of it, and that much of this is mediated by picking up on the underlying fears of people around, especially if their fear is that other ethnicities, cultures and their religions will undermine their social fabric.²⁴ He points out too that this leaves immigrants open to abuse as cultural and religious stereotypes are imposed upon them. Consequently, some end up in a 'limbo' status which requires children in particular to reconcile 'betwixt and between' identities. Finally, he points to the complexity of immigration whereby the positions of parents and children are reversed. The children assimilate more quickly as they enter the education system and parents have to rely on them for guidance. This can be painful as parents lose the sense of imparting wisdom to their children and transmitting the memories and cultural heritage from their 'old' life. The Church's mission in relation to migration surely involves being aware of the need to

²² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-34190436>

²³ Hung Trung Pham SJ, (2015) "'Am I my Brother's Keeper?'" searching for a spirituality for immigrants' *The Way*, Vol. 54. No. 3 pp. 31-43.

²⁴ His Grace Bishop Angelaos notably put out a statement refuting the Hungarian prime minister's comments that we should only help Christians. See <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/hungary-pm-says-muslim-influx-threatening-europes-christian-roots-1518413> and <http://www.pravmir.com/bishop-angaelos-hungarian-pm-is-wrong-we-cannot-only-support-christian-refugees/>

address trauma and suffering and these complex issues of adjustment and integration. We cannot reach out to migrants with love and assistance without being willing to journey with them all the way into their future. MTAG has resources at www.dispossessionproject.org to help Christians think about what 'home' and 'homelessness' mean for refugees and migrants and indeed for all of us.

What can Christians and churches do?

Christians are already at work. A number of Christian organisations, churches and dioceses have made statements of welcome and promises to help migrants and refugees.²⁵ As a matter of mission, we can all commit to following God's mission by working for Jesus' kingdom vision among us. We see that we have our spiritual journeys in common with everyone, including those now arriving among us. Here are some things we, as Christians, can do:

- **We can make our Christian communities into positive voices about migrants and refugees, seeking out and enabling their stories to be told.**
- **We can remember in prayer and with prophetic lament, the high profile deaths such as A(y)lan Kurdi, but we must also champion those whose deaths get overlooked such as those of his brother Ghalib, and many nameless and unknown, whose lives were equally precious before God.**
- **We can support government initiatives, charities and NGOs working for peace and reconciliation in countries ruined by war and the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities.**
- **We can work together to create communities of welcome, love, help and hospitality for everyone, and not just for the short-term but for the whole lives of migrants and asylum seekers settling among us.**
- **We can be places where bad news can be told, stories of fear, abuse, trauma, despair and longing for the lost homes and families. We can be repositories of those stories, held in trust for those families and start to become agents of healing and reconciliation.**
- **We can be more aware of the difficulties facing migrants who settle in the UK and walk with them if they experience alienation and 'limbo'.**
- **We can act in all kinds of practical ways to help people start on the road towards the Isaiah vision, learning from them and helping them utilise their own resources, talents and abilities.**
- **We can show that we are determined to bring good out of evil and to equip migrants and refugees to do the same wherever they are able.**

²⁵ The Rev'd Martin Kettle in the Mission and Public Affairs Division of the Church of England has information on what a variety of churches and organisations are doing in respect of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Genesis 37. 26- 28. Joseph is sold into slavery

Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.' And his brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

'Khama's' Story

They put us up for sale. Many groups of fighters came to buy. We couldn't sleep properly because new groups came at all hours...Sometimes they brought girls back who had been beaten, injured. When they recovered, they were sold again. Eventually, they took all the girls. The women were left behind [and sold last]. Whatever we did, crying, begging, it made no difference. An Islamic State sheikh took the money. It wasn't much. A fighter showed us 15,000 Iraqi dinars [\$13; £8] and said: 'This is your price.'²⁶

Luke 19: 30-37 A man fallen among thieves

'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has said that his country does not want to take in large numbers of Muslims, in defence of Hungary's response to the surge in refugees trying to enter the country. "I think we have a right to decide that we do not want a large number of Muslim people in our country," Orban told journalists outside the EU headquarters at Brussels. "We do not like the consequences," he said, referring to the country's 150-year history of Ottoman rule during the 16th and 17th centuries. Orban said those fleeing conflict in countries such as Syria should not try to cross into Hungary, as he defended the country's decision to erect a fence along its border. "Please don't come... It's risky to come. We can't guarantee that you will be accepted," Orban said in Brussels, adding that it would not be humane or morally right to "falsify" people's dreams. "We Hungarians are full of fear, people in Europe are full of fear because they see that the European leaders, among them the prime ministers, are not able to control the situation," Orban said.²⁷

²⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-30573385>

²⁷ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/refugees-hungary-train-station-150903064140564.html>

Mark 11. 7-10; 15.12-15 Jesus is welcomed then vilified

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

Pilate spoke to them again, 'Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him!' So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Terry's story:²⁸

'I cried when I saw that poor little drowned boy. I wanted to do something. I put a thing on Facebook about refugees being welcome and at that moment I would have done anything to stop those poor people, those children drowning. And I am sorry for them and all they've been through, I really am. But then they were saying at the church about how we ought to take people in. Well, that's not up to us, is it? That's for the government and social services and all those people to do. I couldn't take one in. I don't have enough for my own family, never mind look after someone else. And they don't all deserve it, do they? We've already got a lot of migrants round here. And some of those round here, they really ought to be going home.'

Matthew 25.34-36 welcoming the stranger

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."

Archbishop John Sentamu's story

I am a former Sanctuary seeker. It's something I don't usually write or speak about very often. It's not that I am embarrassed about my sanctuary seeking past or lack deep gratitude to the country that received me – I am and always will be grateful to this country for its compassionate heart and generosity of spirit... but the begrudging grant of an entry visa is not the same as a warm embrace. As a nation we must not only welcome more people but we should also be more welcoming as a people. My own life is testimony that this country is more than able to do both.

²⁸ Story told to MTAG 07/07/15

Pray

A Prayer for the Refugee Crisis can be found at: www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/topical-prayers/a-prayer-for-the-refugee-crisis.aspx

A prayer from Toc H

Almighty God, as your Son our Saviour was born of a Hebrew mother, but rejoiced in the faith of a Syrian woman and of a Roman soldier, welcomed Greeks who sought him, and needed a man from Africa to carry his cross, so teach us to regard the members of all races as fellow heirs of the kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Plan

Many organisations are already at work in response to this crisis. It is worth finding out what local organisations are doing already rather than create new initiatives. What can we all do to develop 'compassionate imagination'?

What resources do we have in our churches and communities to allow us to act strategically for the long term future of migrants and refugees among us?

Further information about the Mission Theology Advisory Group and its work in relation to refugees, migrants, human trafficking and modern day slavery can be found at: www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/mission/mission-theology.aspx