

Scriptural Passages About Migration

Compiled by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Old Testament

Exodus 23: 9

You must not oppress the stranger; you know how a stranger feels, for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19: 32-34

If a stranger lives with you in your land, do not molest him. You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself—for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.

Tobit 4: 7-8

Set aside part of your goods for almsgiving. Never turn your face from any poor man and God will never turn his from you.

Psalms 82: 2-4

No more mockery of justice,
no more favoring of the wicked!
Let the weak and the orphan have justice,
be fair to the wretched and destitute;
rescue the weak and needy,
save them from the clutches of the wicked!

Psalms 103: 6

Yahweh, who does what is right,
is always on the side of the oppressed.

Proverbs 31: 8-9

Speak, yourself, on behalf of the dumb,
on behalf of all the unwanted;
speak, yourself, pronounce a just verdict,
uphold the rights of the poor, of the needy.

Ecclesiasticus 4: 8-9

To the poor man lend an ear,
and return his greeting courteously.
Save the oppressed from the hand of the oppressor,
and do not be mean-spirited in your judgments.

Isaiah 10: 1-2

Woe to the legislators of infamous laws,
to those who issue tyrannical decrees,
who refuse justice to the unfortunate
and cheat the poor among my people of their rights,
who make widows their prey,
and rob the orphan.

Isaiah 61: 1-2

The spirit of the Lord Yahweh has been given to me,
for Yahweh has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,
to bind up hearts that are broken;
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
freedom to those in prison;
to proclaim a year of favor from Yahweh.

Jeremiah 22: 3-4

Yahweh says this: Practice honesty and integrity; rescue the man who has been wronged from the hands of his oppressor; do not exploit the stranger, the orphan, the widow; do no violence, shed no innocent blood in this place.

Micah 6: 8

What is good has been explained to you;
this is what Yahweh asks of you:
only this, to act justly,
to love tenderly,
and to walk humbly with your God.

Zechariah 7: 8-11

(The word of Yahweh was addressed to Zechariah as follows:) He said: Apply the law fairly, and practice kindness and compassion toward each other. Do not oppress the widow and the orphan, the settler and the poor man, and do not secretly plan evil against one another.

New Testament**Matthew 25: 35-40**

For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me; in prison and you came to see me.

. . . I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.

Mark 12: 30-31

This is the first [commandment]...you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.

Luke 4: 18-19

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
for he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives
and to the blind new sight,
to set the downtrodden free,
to proclaim the Lord's year of favor.

Galatians 3: 28

. . . there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2: 5-8

In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus:
His state was divine,
yet he did not cling
to his equality with God
but emptied himself
to assume the condition of a slave,
and became as men are;
and being as all men are,
he was humbler yet,
even to accepting death,
death on a cross.

Colossians 3: 12-13

You are God's chosen race, his saints; he loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience.

1 John 4: 19-21

Anyone who says, 'I love God,'
and hates his brother,
is a liar,
since a man who does not love the brother that he can see
cannot love God, whom he has never seen.
So this is the commandment that he has given us,
that anyone who loves God must also love his brother.

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Pre-Christian Reference

Euripides, 431 B.C.

There is no greater sorrow on earth than the loss of one's native land.

Official Catholic Church Statements

Vatican Documents

Exsul Familia (Pope Pius XII, 1952)

The émigré Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, living in exile in Egypt to escape the fury of an evil king, are, for all times and all places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends, and to seek a foreign soil. [Introduction]

Pacem in Terris (Pope John XXIII, 1963)

Man has the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and finally, the necessary social services. [11]

Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own state. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men. [25]

Minority peoples are often obliged to live within the territories of a nation of a different ethnic origin. [94]

It is quite clear that any attempt to check the vitality and growth of these ethnic minorities is a flagrant violation of justice; the more so if such perverse efforts are aimed at their very extinction. [95]

Indeed, the best interests of justice are served by those public authorities who do all they can to improve the human conditions of the members of these minority groups, especially in what concerns their language, culture, ancient traditions, and their economic activity and enterprise. [96]

The deep feelings of paternal love for all mankind 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 great numbers of such refugees at the present time, and many are the sufferings—the incredible sufferings—to which they are constantly exposed. [103]

It is not irrelevant to draw the attention of the world to the fact that these refugees are persons and all their rights as persons must be recognized. Refugees cannot lose these rights simply because they are deprived of citizenship of their own states. [105]

Pacem in Terris (Pope John XXIII, 1963) continued

Among man's personal rights we must include his right to enter a country in which he hopes to be able to provide more fittingly for himself and his dependents. It is therefore the duty of state officials to accept immigrants and—so far as the good of their own community, rightly understood, permits—to further the aims of those who may wish to become members of a new society. [106]

We therefore take this opportunity of giving our public approval and commendation to every undertaking, founded on the principles of human solidarity or of Christian charity, which aims at relieving the distress of those who are compelled to emigrate from one country to another. [107]

Gaudium et Spes (Second Vatican Council, 1965)

When workers come from another country or district and contribute to the economic advancement of a nation or region by their labor, all discrimination as regards wages and working conditions must be carefully avoided. All the people, moreover, above all the public authorities, must treat them not as mere tools of production but as persons, and must help them to bring their families to live with them and to provide themselves with a decent dwelling; they must also see to it that these workers are incorporated into the social life of the country or region that receives them. [66.1]

Populorum Progressio (Pope Paul VI, 1967)

We cannot insist too much on the duty of giving foreigners a hospitable reception. It is a duty imposed by human solidarity and by Christian charity.... They should be welcomed in the spirit of brotherly love, so that the concrete example of wholesome living may give them a high opinion of authentic Christian charity and of spiritual values. [67]

Emigrant workers should also be given a warm welcome. Their living conditions are often inhuman, and they must scrimp on their earnings in order to send help to their families who have remained behind in their native land in poverty. [69]

Justice in the World (Statement of the Synod of Bishops, 1971)

Our action is to be directed above all at those men and nations which because of various forms of oppression and because of the present character of our society are silent, indeed voiceless, victims of injustice. [20]

Take, for example, the case of migrants. They are often forced to leave their own country to find work, but frequently find the doors closed in their faces because of discriminatory attitudes, or, if they can enter, they are often obliged to lead an insecure life or are treated in an inhuman manner. The same is true of groups that are less well off on the social ladder such as workers and especially farm workers who play a very great part in the process of development. [21]

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

Laborem Exercens (Pope John Paul II, 1981)

The person working away from his native land, whether as a permanent emigrant or a seasonal worker, should not be placed at a disadvantage in comparison with the other workers in that society in the matter of working rights. Emigration in search of work should in no way become an opportunity for financial or social exploitation. As regards to the work relationship, the same criteria should be applied to immigrant workers as to all other workers in the society concerned. The value of work should be measured by the same standard and not according to the difference in nationality, religion or race. [23.2]

Centesimus Annus (Encyclical of Pope John Paul II, 1991)

The Church's love for the poor, which is essential for her and a part of her constant tradition, impels her to give attention to a world in which poverty is threatening to assume massive proportions in spite of technological and economic progress. In the countries of the West, different forms of poverty are being experienced by groups which live on the margins of society, by the elderly and the sick, by the victims of consumerism and even more immediately by so many refugees and migrants. [57]

U.S. Bishops' Documents

Resolution on the Pastoral Concern of the Church for the People on the Move (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1976)

Many of today's immigrants are doubly marginal: they are forced to migrate because of inadequate resources and unequal distribution of goods; then, in their countries of adoption, they are sometimes ignored or subjected to new injustices. Perhaps it is because of such compounded injustice that Jesus specifically promises His Kingdom to those who recognize Him in the immigrant. (p. 1)

As a leaven in the world, the Church is called to participate in human affairs and to recognize in the poor, the afflicted, and the oppressed the presence of the Lord summoning the Christian community to action. (p. 2)

Seen in this evangelical perspective, immigrants, refugees, migrant workers, seamen and other people uprooted and on the move for survival and human dignity are a theological sign to the Christian community. They are among those signs of the times to which the Second Vatican Council called our attention in order to discern the working of God's will. (p. 2)

The Church, the People of God, is required by the Gospel and by its long tradition to promote and defend the human rights and dignity of people on the move, to advocate social remedies to their problems, and to foster opportunities for their spiritual and religious growth. We pledge ourselves and urge our brothers and sisters in the Lord, to resist injustices against immigrants, to assist them in their need, and to welcome them into our nation and our community of faith as fellow pilgrims on the journey to the Father. It is our duty and our privilege to respond in this way to the biblical injunction: "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be as the native among you and you shall love him as yourself." (Lv. 19:34)

Together A New People: Pastoral Statement on Migrants & Refugees (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986)

Building on its past tradition and consistent with its teaching on the dignity of the human person and our common relationship whom we address as "our" Father (Mt 6:9), the Church renews its mission of acceptance of and support for all brothers and sisters from any different culture. (p.6)

The mission of the Church, then, as the trusted and familiar home for most of the nation's newest arrivals, is a ministry of evangelization and service. The task of welcoming immigrants, refugees and displaced persons into full participation in the Church and society with equal rights and duties continues the biblical understanding of the justice of God reaching out to all peoples....(p.7)

At the same time, our vision of the future includes a broader understanding of the root causes of migrations in contemporary society and a clearer acceptance of international responsibility. In the interrelated and interdependent community of nations, our policy decisions concerning foreign relations, trade, and economic and social development bear directly on the movements of people. (p.11)

One Family Under God (U.S. Bishops' Committee on Migration, 1995)

Immigrant policy should be designed to enhance and affirm the basic protection of human dignity. The primary aspects are as follows:

- Persons fleeing persecution or other refugee-like situations have a special moral standing and thus require special consideration.
- Workers have the right to work and live without exploitation.
- Family reunification remains the appropriate basis for just immigration policy.
- Every effort should be made to encourage and enable highly skilled and educated persons to remain in or return to their homelands.
- Efforts to stem migration that do not effectively address its root causes are not only ineffectual, but permit the continuation of the political, social, and economic inequities that cause it. (p.9-10)

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