



The Holy See

JOHN XXIII

*Radio Message for the world-wide Refugee Year**

Jun 28, 1959

We learn with deep satisfaction that the United Nations plans a world-wide Refugee Year, to begin. June, 1959, and to end June, 1960. We wholeheartedly lend the moral support of Our encouragement to this noble effort.

The lot of those who live exiled far from their fatherland has always attracted the maternal solicitude of the Catholic Church in a very special way, for she cannot forget the words of Christ, her divine founder: «I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me . . . I was in prison and you came to me» (Matt. 25, 35-36).

As everyone knows, hundreds of thousands of refugees are, for various reasons, victims of the turmoil of recent years, and are still detained in camps, housed in huts, humbled in their dignity as men, and exposed at times to circumstances provocative of severe temptations of discouragement and despair.

What generous man can remain indifferent to the spectacle of so many men, women, and even children being deprived of some of their most basic human rights, through no fault of their own; of families disbanded against their will, husbands separated from their wives, and children kept far from their parents... What a pitiful anomaly for modern society, so proud of its technical and social progress! Every individual is duty bound to become aware of this situation and to do what he can to abolish it.

What is there that was not done for the refugees of World War I by Benedict XV, whose generous heart was so keenly sensitive to human distress? Then, in his turn, what is there that Our immediate Predecessor, Pius XII, did not do for refugees during the last war? For he too was

extremely compassionate toward human suffering and sensitive to every breach of natural law! How many times did not the Holy See intervene on an international plane! What efforts did not the Holy See make and what assistance of all kinds came from Vatican City during those tragic years! We Ourselves were a deeply moved witness and an instrument for some of this work, which achieved such a variety of good results.

Called to inherit this precious legacy of charity and of defense of the poor, which is one of the most beautiful jewels of the Catholic Church, We, in Our turn, raise Our voice in behalf of refugees and paternally exhort Our sons in every corner of the world to work generously and diligently for the success of this world-wide Refugee Year. It is a Year which is inspired by noble and disinterested intentions and We are pleased to render homage to it. Let all then strive, according to their ability, to improve the lot of their unfortunate brothers, mindful of the fact that their attachment to the Church and to Christ has in many a case not been unrelated to their present trials. And should one or the other – which God forbid – be tempted to close his heart to this appeal, let him remember the grave warning of Our Predecessor: «Ought not you who remain indifferent to the anguishes of the refugee, who is wandering about without a roof over his head, consider yourselves responsible for him; for his miserable lot today may well be yours tomorrow?» (Pius XII, 1950 Christmas Message, AAS 43 [1951] p. 56)

We especially exhort pastors of souls to call the attention of their faithful to this invitation by divine Providence to manifest their sentiments of Christian charity.

Since private initiative is powerless of itself to resolve problems of this amplitude, We are confident that public authority will, during this year, be interested in further pursuing and intensifying the efforts which have so laudably been begun in this field. Important results, We know, have already been accomplished on an international scale, notably the formulation and adoption by a rather considerable number of States of the Convention of 1951 regarding the Statute of Refugees. May these States, and others following their lead, open their frontiers ever more generously and work with dispatch for the human and social redistribution of so many unfortunate people. May these latter soon enjoy what they so ardently desire, namely, a respectable existence in the country that hospitably adopts them and the peaceful enjoyment of their personal and family rights.

On all those individuals and groups who will hasten the fulfillment of this very desirable goal by working in some way—as We shall do according to Our means—for the success of the world-wide Refugee Year, We lovingly invoke the protection and the special favors of the all powerful and merciful God.

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