

The asylum seeker: a faith perspective

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In my view and in the course of my dealings with refugees and migrants of all kinds, faith is a spiritual attitude for reaching the core of the person – as a human being who can be called brother, friend, guest, someone who can knock at my door and I open it. There is no element of charity or pity but a choice that comes from my faith. Thus I would like to clear the ground of any attempt to use the refugee as a possible object of proselytism. I have always considered this to be taking advantage of someone's vulnerability and subjecting them to another form of violence. Our (Catholic) mission is rather to offer love and compassion.

In contrast to the law, which is cold and regimented, an organisation based on faith will listen and try to understand when unjust laws, traditions, cultures or ideologies cause refugees to flee. Faith – of any religion – is about freedom. The concept of 'rights' too runs the risk of being treated coldly, like the law. If we act out rights in a routine or functional manner we should drop the label of faith or religious belief – to say we were acting from faith would be hypocritical and immediately be seen as such by others. And, as I have learnt from many refugees, faith is about hope, which is a force that is

incomprehensible to those who live within the logic of merit, the justice of the street or strict definitions.

In this already sensitive area, one of today's problems is the geographical or religious distance that refugees have come from. Here in Mexico we have people from, for example, Nepal, Bangladesh, Iraq, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia, so those who are appointed by faith organisations to work with them need to have a broad, tolerant and comprehensive vision. Opening oneself to those of other religions or their practices does not risk sullyng our faith but can create linkages and a future where diversity and solidarity can be celebrated. When the asylum seeker meets the same coldness as is sometimes found in government organisations or their subcontracted agencies, this can be a blow to their hope of finding a reception that they have not found before. Acting in keeping with universal moral values sends a message of hope to people who may have experienced any manner of disappointment and persecution.

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