

**Confronting Extremist Violence, the Refugee Crisis, and Fear:
Faith Responses
The Kansas City Public Library - Plaza Branch
Paul Turner**

I'd like to thank the Kansas City Library for its Immigrant Heritage Series, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council for sponsoring this event and including a representative from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. Bishop James Johnston regrets he is unable to appear tonight, but he shares a deep concern about these matters.

I've been asked to present Catholic teaching pertaining to extremist violence and human suffering as it relates to events in Syria, Iraq, the refugee crisis, and the response from the United States.

The 2005 Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, assembled by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, condemns terrorism and promotes eliminating its sources, in these words: "Terrorism is one of the most brutal forms of violence traumatizing the international community today; it sows hatred, death, and an urge for revenge and reprisal.... The fight against terrorism presupposes the moral duty to help create those conditions that will prevent it from arising or developing."¹

Pope John Paul II noted on the 2002 World Day of Peace that terrorism is an offense against all humanity, yet he admitted that "there exists, therefore, a right to defend oneself from terrorism." Nonetheless, the Compendium notes, "this right cannot be exercised in the absence of moral and legal norms, because the struggle against terrorists must be carried out with respect for human rights and for the principles of a State ruled by law."² Pope John Paul also said, "It is essential that the use of force, even when necessary, be accompanied by a courageous and lucid analysis of the reasons behind terrorist attacks."³

Concerning perpetrators, the Compendium says, "The identification of the guilty party must be duly proven, because criminal responsibility is always personal, and therefore cannot be extended to the religions, nations or ethnic groups to which the terrorists belong.... It is a profanation and a blasphemy to declare oneself a terrorist in God's name.... No religion may tolerate terrorism and much less preach it."⁴

Pope Francis on this year's World Day of Migrants and Refugees wrapped his message inside his theme of the Year of Mercy. He writes, "Today, more than in the past, the Gospel of mercy troubles our consciences, prevents us from

¹ CSDC 513.

² Ibid., 514.

³ Ibid. 2004 World Day of Peace.

⁴ Ibid., 515.

taking the suffering of others for granted, and points out ways of responding which, grounded in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, find practical expression in works of spiritual and corporal mercy.”⁵ He admits that the presence of migrants and refugees challenges the societies that accept them: “Those who migrate are forced to change some of their most distinctive characteristics and, whether they like it or not, even those who welcome them are also forced to change.” Among the human rights he defends is “the right not to emigrate and to contribute to the development of one’s country of origin.”

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops writes this in its election year guide, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship:” “Though we recognize the justifiable use of military force, we encourage the reallocation of resources from armed conflict to the urgent needs of the poor and the root causes of violence. Further, we support policies and actions that protect refugees of war and violence, at home and abroad, and all people suffering religious persecution throughout the world, many of whom are our fellow Christians.”⁶

Fear is one obstacle to hospitality. The First Letter of John famously says that perfect love casts out fear. However, fear threatens to cast out love. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “The most fundamental passion is love, aroused by the attraction of the good.... The apprehension of evil causes hatred, aversion, and fear of the impending evil; this movement ends in sadness at some present evil, or in the anger that resists it.”⁷

In the United States, we have the right and responsibility to protect our lives. At the same time we must love our neighbor. Our leaders will serve us well if they do not pander to fear, but help us overcome it. We Americans are hospitable by nature, and we really do care about those who suffer injustice. Not just faith leaders, but even politicians and the media promote acts of charity.

I am pastor of a church in northeast Kansas City, arguably the most integrated part of the entire metropolitan area. We have in our midst multi-generational Kansas City families as well as refugees from Asia, Africa and Latin America. We have our struggles. We don’t always get along. But we know we will not be authentic human beings if we do practice love of our neighbors, in our church and at home.

⁵ https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html.

⁶ <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf>

⁷ CCC 1765.