

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY
TO REFUGEES FOR BAPTIST CHURCHES
IN SOUTH AFRICA

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DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

D J Stemmett

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SUMMARY

The issue of refugees in South Africa has come under the spotlight recently, particularly in the light of the xenophobic violence that swept the country in 2008. As a Baptist pastor, working in a congregation which has a vital ministry towards refugees, the writer became aware that only a handful of Baptist congregations in the Western Cape had a similar concern for refugees and asylum seekers. These observations raised the question of ministry to refugees on the part of Baptist churches in SA. As Baptist churches adhere to the principle of the supremacy of Scripture, the motivation for churches to minister to refugees should to be based upon biblical theology. This dissertation seeks to provide such a biblical theology of ministry to refugees that can in turn provide a basis from which local congregation can develop such ministry.

To provide the context of refugees in SA, this study begins by outlining the phenomenon of refugees in the context of SA, as well as the conditions experienced by refugees. This dissertation further seeks to delineate a number of Baptist principles that relate to the issue of Baptist churches and ministry to refugees. It also seeks to look at the role that various Baptist agencies such as the Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA) and the Western Province Baptist Association have to play in ministry to refugees.

The study then goes on to discuss biblical material from both the Old and New Testaments pertaining to refugees. The dissertation then seeks to develop a theology of ministry to refugees based upon the biblical material that can be used to motivate local Baptist congregations to minister to refugees. In the final section the theology of ministry to refugees is used to evaluate current models of ministry directed towards refugees.

KEY WORDS

1. Assimilation
2. Asylum seeker
3. Baptist
4. Baptist principles
5. Biblical basis
6. Church
7. Congregation
8. Exile
9. Foreigner
10. Hospitality
11. Integration
12. Migrants
13. Model of ministry
14. Refugee
15. Refugee identity
16. Stranger
17. Xenophobia.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AU	African Union
BUSA	Baptist Union of Southern Africa
CASE	Community Agency for Social Enquiry
CCS	Centre for Civil Society
CTRC	Cape Town Refugee Centre
CWS	Christian World Service
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GCIM	Global Commission on International Migration
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Network
IRS	International Refugee Services
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LRC	Legal Resources Centre
LHR	Lawyers for Human Rights
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
NCRA	National Consortium on Refugee Affairs
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OAU	Organisation for African Unity
RRO	Refugee Reception Office
SA	South Africa
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SAMP	Southern African Migration Project
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WPBA	Western Province Baptist Association

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCING THE ISSUE OF REFUGEES

South Africa (SA) is no longer isolated from the rest of the world and in particular the rest of Africa as was the case during the apartheid era. With this new openness to the rest of the world have come new challenges both for SA and South African churches. One of the many new challenges facing SA is the phenomenon of asylum seekers who come to this country seeking refuge from unrest, war and poverty. The way the South African government and its various agencies, as well as the general South African population respond to this influx of refugees is a real test of our fledgling democracy.

Similarly, the way Christian congregations respond to the foreigners among us can be seen as a test of obedience to Scripture and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is more than just a matter of a humanitarian response to one need among many. The question of refugees touches on a number of biblical issues, from the fall of mankind into sin, the subsequent expulsion from Eden, the nature of the people of Israel, to the call in the New Testament to Christians to practice hospitality. The very word translated hospitality in most English translations of the New Testament is the Greek term *philoxenia*, namely “love of strangers” (Wigram 1852:426). Thus for SA Baptists, who believe in the principle of the supremacy of Scripture, there is an array of biblical motivations that should encourage local Baptist congregations to minister to refugees.

As Gordon Preece (2005:3) states in an article written from an Australian perspective, “From Genesis to the Gospels there is a profound creation and christologically based reason for just, merciful and hospitable treatment of refugees”.

The question needs to be asked: Is this the way Christians and in particular Baptists in SA are treating the refugees with whom they have contact?

While there are growing numbers of refugees living in SA, and in the Western Cape, a simple observation of what local Baptist churches are doing in order to minister to refugees and asylum seekers revealed that very little was being done. This lack of ministry to refugees and a confusion concerning what the local church could and should do, set against what a few local churches are doing for refugees, provided the motivation for this study. There is a need for Baptist churches and church leaders to consider both the phenomenon of asylum seekers and refugees in SA, as well as the biblical material that informs God's people about the way they ought to respond to people who have been forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in a foreign place. Baptist churches are autonomous congregations and because the BUSA has no authority over its member churches to force them to adopt any policies or ministries the best way to motivate a local Baptist congregation to embark upon any form of ministry is to present it with a clear biblical mandate for doing so (Cook 1961:19).

Baptist congregations have historically been distinguishable from other evangelical churches by certain principles, which though not unique to Baptists, when taken collectively they set Baptist churches apart. These principles, starting with the principle of the Direct Lordship of Christ, the Supremacy of Scripture and moving to Regenerate Church Membership, Believers' Baptism, the Congregational Principle, the Autonomy of the Local Congregation, the Separation of Church and State, Liberty of Conscience and so on, have a bearing on the way local Baptist congregations embark upon and conduct ministry.

The historical development of these convictions and their implications in terms of how the early Baptists were persecuted and put to death because of them, gives us insight into the identity of Baptists. They reveal both the refugee identity of Baptists as well as a vital point of contact for Baptist congregations with foreigners in our land. This in turn provides an historical precedent for calling Baptist churches to reach out to people who have fled their homeland and are often found to be out of step with their host society because of their differences. Just as the early Baptists came to their convictions concerning the Baptism of Believers and the Separation of Church and State through the

application of reason after a careful study of the Scriptures, so ministry in whatever form among Baptist congregations needs to be determined by the application of reason to a careful study of Scripture (Robinson 1938:63).

For Baptists, in grappling with the issues relating to refugees, there can be no "substitute for clear, up-to-date and biblically rooted thinking, which can help navigate us through the minefield of confused definitions and slippery statistics and understand and evaluate the issues in their entirety" (Spencer 2004:158).

In the major cities of SA, such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban it is not difficult to find refugees. Many refugees work in public places as security guards and car guards and the general South African population encounters them on a regular basis. Refugees can often be identified by the way they look, dress and speak. Much has been written in the press, in articles and books by advocacy groups describing the conditions under which refugees and asylum seekers live in SA. This data is useful for Baptist congregations if they are to minister to refugees in a meaningful way.

Refugees are to be found all over the world and the issues of immigration and refugees are assuming a growing level of importance in countries like Great Britain and the USA. As Spencer (2004:15) indicates:

Asylum is one of the most important issues facing Western governments today. Politicians like to talk tough about it. Newspapers run campaigns on it. Far right parties capitalise on people's fear and loathing.

The matter of refugees is somewhat different in this country, as SA is part of Africa, which has been a continent that has traditionally produced refugees. Yet, SA has become a destination of choice among many of Africa's refugees and economic migrants. While many refugees to SA do settle down, become established, and are able to use their skills and abilities to earn a living and even provide employment for others, there are as many, if not more refugees who struggle to adapt to South African conditions. They are harassed by over-stretched and possibly corrupt civil servants. They battle to learn a new

language, struggle to find work and to find accommodation that is often expensive, cramped and unhealthy.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

At the heart of this study lie three questions relating to Baptists in SA and ministry to refugees:

1. Are Baptist congregations in SA ministering to refugees?
2. Should Baptist congregations be involved in ministry to refugees?
3. How can Baptist congregations in SA go about ministering to refugees in a way that reflects Biblical teaching?

Before attempting to answer these questions this study will attempt to establish, and understand the phenomenon of refugees in the context of post-apartheid SA. This will set the backdrop against which ministry needs to be done. As Baptist churches in this country are by and large theologically conservative and derive their teaching and practice from the Bible, the above questions must also be considered and addressed in the light of the teaching of the Bible (Parnell 1980:14-15).

1.3 CENTRAL ARGUMENT OF THIS DISSERTATION

The central argument of this study is that where South African Baptist congregations are in contact with refugees and asylum seekers, they should seek to understand their position, welcome them into their churches, homes and lives, and seek to minister them in the name of Christ. Following this is the complimentary argument that the teaching of the Bible and our Baptist identity present us with both a mandate for such ministry, and the general guidelines regarding the way that Baptist congregations should go about such ministry.

1.4 MOTIVATION FOR THIS STUDY

1.4.1 *Local church experience*

This study arises out of the context of the practical experience of a local Baptist congregation, Bellville Baptist Church, seeking to obey the mandate of Scripture in reaching out to marginalised groups in our community. Serving as a pastor of a congregation that has a history of ministering to groups on the fringes of society has provided the researcher with opportunities to make contact with people who are often ignored by middle-class society in which the Bellville church is situated. The fact that this congregation is involved in such ministry is partly due to the location of the church facilities. These are in relatively close proximity to a town centre that has transitioned from being a commercial district for formerly privileged white South Africans to a transport and commercial hub for formerly disadvantaged people.

Over the past ten years, the congregation has sought to meet the challenges of a society in transition. The congregation itself has undergone a major transition since the first democratic elections in SA in 1994: it has transitioned from a purely white congregation into a multi-cultural community of Christians. At present there are over twenty nationalities and cultural groups represented in the church.

The leaders of the church have intentionally led and directed this transition. The multi-cultural nature of the congregation is not only to be seen in the membership of the church, those who attend church activities and the people we minister to, but it can also be seen in the church leadership. The three pastors and six elders alone represent six different nationalities and cultures.

In their commitment to the goal of equipping people and preparing them for eternity in heaven, the leaders of the church have committed themselves to being obedient to Jesus Christ in his prayer, where he calls us to pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). In 2003, as the researcher was

considering the Lord's Prayer, the question arose, "What is the Father's will for the church in heaven?" As he meditated on that question, he began to ask, "How can I ensure that the will of God for heaven is established in the congregation I serve here on earth?"

Turning to the book of Revelation, the author was reminded that God's people in heaven will be made up of people from "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9). While there may be different interpretations regarding this multitude, e.g. Whether it represents only the Gentile church, or includes the Jews, whether it multitude consists of those who have faced martyrdom or not (see Ladd 1972:117); commentators¹ generally see this visionary portrayal as being the church triumphant. The church that has overcome sin and death is described in terms that emphasise the truth that God's people are drawn from all nations and peoples on earth.²

This understanding of the multi-cultural nature of the church in heaven, as well as the desire to do the Lord's will here on earth resulted in the leaders of the congregation making it their aim to intentionally develop a multi-cultural congregation.

The multi-cultural constituency of the church and its leadership does at times lead to differences of opinion and has resulted in some people leaving the congregation. The issue of the unity of the church and the differences among Christians is one that has been debated at length. As G C Berkouwer (1976:30-31) indicates,

The unity of the church is most closely connected with God's express intention to gather a people for His name; its background is the on call of God out of darkness into His marvellous light, the call of the one people to the gracious election of God, to be His possession

¹ See Wilcock M 1989: 80

² Speaking of the language used by the writer in Revelation 7:9, Leon Morris (1969:116) comments: "He piles one expression on another to indicate the crowd's universality".

Berkouwer (1976:9) deals with the issue of unity and division in the church from both the description of the church described in the Bible, as well as from the position of “the church as she really is”. He does not simply wish to view the church in the abstract, but rather in the context of history (1976:9).

In this dissertation the researcher seeks to take a similar approach in regard to ministry to refugees. While the biblical material provides a description of what the church should be doing, in reality, the experience of refugees and the relationship of the local church towards them can be very different. This is clearly revealed in the results of a questionnaire that was completed by leaders in Baptist congregations in Cape Town, where the researcher posed four questions to leaders of Baptist churches in the WPBA.³

The reality of working in a multi-cultural congregation also bears out the tension between unity and division that the Bellville church experienced, as well as the gap between the idealistic description of the church that can be drawn from the Scriptures and the reality of a local congregation. Yet, in spite of the tension between what we should be and what we are, there has been great harmony as the leaders and congregation have sought to live out the motto of the Bellville Baptist Church, which is to *radiate the joy of Jesus to all nations*.

A consequence of the changes in the congregation has been a shift in the direction of the church’s ministry. In former years, ministry was directed largely towards the wealthier, formerly white suburbs of the Bellville area, whereas today the emphasis is in the direction of the poor and marginalised peoples in the community. For example since 2002 the congregation has been involved extensively in ministry to street dwellers and juvenile offenders in a local prison. More recently, from 2004, the church became aware of the specific needs of another group living in relatively close proximity to the church facilities, namely refugees and asylum seekers in SA.

³ see 3.2.5 for the questions, the way it was distributed and the and results of the questions.

As the congregation began to work both spiritually and practically with refugees, they made a number of discoveries:

1. There were more refugees living in the area than they had expected.
2. The refugees faced more problems than the church had initially anticipated.
3. There was a relatively high proportion of Christians among the refugees in the area, including a number of Baptists, some of whom had served in leadership positions in their home churches.

The Bellville congregation had to consider whether they should be actively involved in ministry to refugees. Once they agreed that they should, the next step was to determine the needs of the refugees and determine what resources could be found within the congregation to meet those needs. As the church embarked on various ministries directed at refugees, the leaders began to examine the Scriptures afresh in an attempt to evaluate the strategies and programmes the congregation was implementing in the light of Biblical teaching.

1.4.2 Denominational context

The local church ministry to refugees began during the period when the researcher was serving on the Executive Committee of the Western Province Baptist Association (WPBA). That put the writer in a position to determine the level of ministry directed towards refugees and asylum seekers by other Baptist congregations. As a result of discussion on the WPBA Executive Committee, the researcher was tasked with seeking to determine which Baptist congregations in the WPBA were involved in ministry to refugees and to set up a network of Baptist churches that were actively ministering to refugees (Meeting with pastors Jan 2004).

The purpose of such a network was mutual encouragement through sharing of experiences and resources, as well as ongoing improvement in the way that Baptist churches minister to refugees. The researcher made the discovery that

while many church leaders were aware of refugees living or working in the areas served by their congregations, in 2004, less than ten percent of the Baptist churches in the Western Cape had any form of ministry directed towards them.

In making contact with and seeking to build links between the various congregations that were involved in ministry to refugees, it was also found that different congregations used different styles or models of ministry. In most cases congregations did not set out deliberately to develop the model of ministry they adopted. Rather, they used models that reflected the past ministry of the church (Meeting with pastors Jan 2004).

In seeking to grapple with the question, “How can Baptist congregations in SA go about ministry to refugees in a way that reflects the teaching of the Bible?” this study seeks to outline some of the models of ministry to refugees that have been adopted by churches working with refugees. After developing a rudimentary theology of ministry, aspects of that section will be used to formulate questions that could be used to evaluate either a model of ministry to refugees or a particular aspect of such a ministry. This study is done from a position where the author believes that models of ministry need to be examined in the light of the biblical material relating to refugees.

This study further seeks to survey the biblical material relating to refugees and displaced peoples with the objective of developing a biblical theology of refugees. Such a theology of refugees could be used to inform local churches about the need to reach out to refugees. A theology of refugees could also serve as a possible critique of ministry that is directed to the refugee community and provide guidelines in the development of such ministry, both at the local church level and for the territorial association and possibly the national level as well.

1.5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

The aims of this research are:

1. To better understand the phenomenon of refugees in the context of a post- apartheid SA.
2. To determine the level to which Baptist congregations in SA are involved in ministry to refugees.
3. To develop a biblical theology of refugees that can serve to inform local Baptist congregations and denominational agencies about the need and the possibility of ministry to refugees.
4. To evaluate current ministry to refugees through the lens of the theology.

To reach these aims, the following objectives needed to be accomplished:

- To gain a better understanding of the situation pertaining to refugees in SA.
- To find out which Baptist congregations in the WPBA are involved in ministry to refugees.
- To gain an understanding of the ways that Baptist churches are ministering to refugees.
- To make a short study of Baptist history and distinctives to determine if these provide reasons for ministry to refugees.
- To gain a deeper understanding of the biblical material relating to displaced people in order to gain a better understanding of the nation of Israel and the relationships between Israelites and foreigners.
- To seek to survey the teaching in the New Testament, both in regards to the nature of a Christian as an “alien and stranger” and the instructions regarding the treatment of strangers.
- To draw together the various elements of the biblical material into a theology of ministry to refugees.

1.6 DESIRED PRACTICAL OUTCOMES

There are two desired practical outcomes that could arise from this study:

1. To inform local congregations of the need and the possibility of ministry to refugees. This will assist Baptist churches and church leaders to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of refugees as well as the conditions that refugees in SA often have to endure. Following this is the presentation of biblical reasons why a local Baptist church should minister to refugees. The researcher will seek to do this by developing a biblically based theology of refugees that sets out the teaching of Scripture concerning displaced peoples against the modern phenomenon of refugees in SA. The objective of such a theology of refugees is to motivate local congregations to consider reaching out in ministry to refugees.
2. An evaluation of the models of ministry that are currently being used in ministry to refugees. This could assist congregations to assess their own ministry to refugees and help them in planning for the future. The objective of this analysis would not be to criticise or discourage churches from ministering to refugees, but rather to encourage local congregations who are presently involved in ministry to refugees to understand what they are doing in the light of a biblical theology of refugees.

A theology of refugees can assist church leaders in explaining to the congregation why and how they should go about ministry to refugees. There is a need for a clear biblical rationale for such a ministry, as working with refugees, like any ministry to marginalised groups of people can be draining on a congregation's resources. Given the current climate of xenophobia in SA, ministry to refugees can also attract criticism and even opposition in a local congregation and pastors and leaders involved in such ministry need as much encouragement and support as they can get.

1.7 METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study was conducted utilising the following research methods:

- **Literature review** of material pertaining to the phenomenon of refugees, with special reference to refugees in SA. This involved a review of books, journal articles, newspaper articles, online Internet articles, government, non governmental organisation and United Nations' publications.
- **Biblical exegesis** conducted according to the grammatical historical method. This includes a survey of relevant portions of the Old and New Testament along with commentaries, articles and books dealing with the biblical material and/or theology derived from the biblical material.
- **Interviews with refugees** both individually and in small groups to gain their perspectives on living in SA, as well as their perceptions of church ministry and their involvement in the church.
- **Survey of pastors and church leaders** to determine the levels of awareness of refugees as well as the levels of ministry to refugees among Baptist congregations in the WPBA.
- **Interviews and discussions with pastors and leaders** of WPBA congregations that are involved in ministry to refugees.
- **Personal observation of church ministry to refugees.** This entailed visits to WPBA churches during a Sunday worship service to ascertain what the churches were doing in regard to refugees and the model of ministry they are employing.
- **An analysis of the material** relating to refugees in SA, Baptist history and Baptist principles and the Scriptural material in order to draw together theological and practical applications in order to develop a theology of refugees.

2 REFUGEES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

As this dissertation deals with the issue of Baptist Churches and their ministry to refugees in the context of SA, it is important to understand who the refugees are and their circumstances in this country. In this chapter the researcher will seek to present an overview of:

- 2.1 The issue of refugees in SA.
- 2.2 Definitions in the field of refugee research.
- 2.3 Who the refugees are that have sought asylum in SA?
- 2.4 What drives them from their countries of origin and what draws them to SA?
- 2.5 What they encounter in SA, in particular some of the problems they encounter in this country.

2.1 THE ISSUE OF REFUGEES IN SA

The issue of refugees is a very hotly debated subject in many countries of the world. The subject is hotly debated in Europe and North America, where policy relating to the best way to deal with issues of immigration and asylum seekers form a major part of the political rhetoric (Rosner 2002:1). The matter raises equally high levels of debate in SA, where since the advent of true democracy in this country, there has been an influx of refugees into SA. Indeed it is hard to remain neutral when considering the migration of people from poor, underdeveloped countries to countries that have a higher degree of resources.

The present reality of refugees in SA can be traced back through the history of the region. The current influx of refugees from other parts of Africa has been

preceded by centuries of migration from the rest of Africa, Europe and Asia. Internal struggles and socio-political interventions and policies have also produced migrations away from SA. Here we include the apartheid policies that resulted in people leaving SA to seek a better life or a place from which to campaign for change within SA. Racial segregation, the Group Areas Act and the homelands policy resulted in the displacement of millions of people within SA (Landau 2004:3).

One noteworthy pattern is that the vast majority of refugees are hosted by countries in the South. Africa hosts more than twice as many as Europe, North America and Oceania combined. Malawi, for a decade, hosted over a million refugees from Mozambique, one for every ten of its own people, even though it is one of the poorest countries in the world and it received little help from the international community (Janzen 1998:10).

The majority of the current refugees to SA come from other parts of Africa, although there are significant numbers of asylum seekers in SA who come from the Indian sub-continent (Crush, Peberdy & Williams 2006:6).

A common negative response to refugees is that people from other parts of the continent are taking jobs that South Africans should be filling. Another common response is that the foreigners are responsible for much of the crime in SA and that they are involved in drug trafficking and other illegal activities. While there are some individuals and groups of individuals who are no doubt involved in illicit activity and crime in SA (Waller 2006:7), it is grossly unfair to label all asylum seekers and refugees as criminals. Belinda Dodson (2002:1) puts it bluntly but succinctly in one of the South Africa Migration Project's (SAMP) papers: "South Africa is a highly xenophobic society, which out of fear of foreigners, does not naturally value the human rights of non-nationals".

In an article written for the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, Jonathan Crush (2004:1) observes, "South Africa's transition to a new post-apartheid immigration policy has been slow and tortuous, and is currently characterized by deep uncertainty". The official government response to the influx of refugees

in the 1990's and early 2000's tended to be ambivalent. On the one hand there was a genuine openness and willingness for SA to be part of a humane global society that sought to relieve the plight of the oppressed. Behind this was the understanding that many people from SA, who had been involved in the struggle against apartheid, had found refuge in other countries and it was only right to repay that debt by opening our own country to people who were seeking to escape oppression (Mapisa-Nqakula 2005:1).

On the other hand alarmist voices have been raised, warning of a mass influx of refugees from strife torn regions of Africa to the north of us. One of the most vocal of such warnings came from the former Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Buthelezi, who issued a number of statements concerning this perceived influx of refugees. In a media briefing in 1997 he stated that SA is,

Faced with another threat and that is the SADC ideology of free movement of people, free trade and freedom to choose where you live or work. Free movement of persons spells disaster for our country, we cannot feed the population properly as it is, let alone persons from across our borders (Buthelezi cited in Munetsi 1997:1).

At a press conference in February 1998 the Minister of Home Affairs asserted,

With an illegal alien population estimated at between 2.5 million and 5 million, it is obvious that the socioeconomic resources of the country, which are under severe strain as it is, are further being burdened by the presence of illegal aliens. The cost implication becomes even clearer when one makes a calculation suggesting that if every illegal costs our infrastructure, say R1 000 per annum, then multiplied with whatever number you wish, it becomes obvious that the cost becomes billions of rands per year (Buthelezi cited in Crush & Williams 2001a:1).

In 2002, the National Commissioner of the South African Police Service stated that there were 8 million illegal immigrants in SA (cited in Palmary 2005:1).

These statements were picked up by the media at the time and quoted in alarmist press articles, which sought to sensationalize the 'flood of illegal aliens' into SA. The figures quoted by the Minister of Home Affairs and the National

Police Commissioner were unsubstantiated and not based upon factual evidence. The description was one of much of Africa engulfed in conflict and poverty and people from those countries streaming over SA's borders and depleting the resources of the country (Crush & Williams 2001a:13).

The migration debate in SA is obsessed with the unanswerable question: "how many?" But neither the post-apartheid state nor researchers have yet developed the capacity to produce defensible estimates. In the vacuum, cavalier and exaggerated numbers predominate (Crush & McDonald 2002:3).

The figures that the former Minister of Home Affairs drew upon were based upon the estimations by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) that in 1995 that there were between 2.5 million and 4 million illegal immigrants in SA (Landau 2004:5).

In their SAMP paper *Making up the numbers, Measuring 'Illegal Immigration' to South Africa*, Jonathan Crush and Vincent Williams (2001a:13), describe the flawed methodology employed by the HSRC to arrive at these inflated numbers:

The state-funded Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) has developed what it claims is a 'scientific method' for measuring the illegal presence. Every 6 months, the HSRC undertakes a countrywide door-to-door sample survey which asks: 'How many people who are not SA citizens live in the houses around this property?' Extrapolating the answers, the HSRC concluded that 9.1 million non-citizens were in the country in mid-1994. Subtracting the number of non-citizens legally resident in the country, the HSRC concluded that around 4.5 million were there illegally.

When these figures were challenged on the basis of the methods used to obtain them, the HSRC hastily retracted their so-called findings and issued an apology for the unsubstantiated numbers they had published. Research in 2005 by the Geneva-based Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) concluded that there were serious methodological flaws in the estimated numbers of migrants in SA. The report (IRIN 2005:1).stated, "South Africans

believe that 25 percent of the population is foreign; the figure is probably closer to three to five percent, with around 500,000 undocumented migrants"

Since the early reactionary responses to refugees in SA, there has been a rise in the number of groups involved in advocacy on behalf of refugees. Research groups such as SAMP and the UNHCR research arm IRIN have sought to gain a more accurate description of immigration to SA and have exerted pressure on government and government agencies to respond to refugees in keeping with international protocols.

The government attitude, particularly that of the Department of Home Affairs has softened considerably and the press has also taken a far more sympathetic stance on reporting the plight of refugees. The concerted efforts of the various advocacy groups have also had an impact upon local government. Where previously refugees were at best ignored or at worst considered to be a threat to local communities, there has been an attempt to understand the position of refugees and to address refugee issues in a positive way. An example of this was the Conference on Refugees held in Cape Town in June 2006, hosted by the City of Cape Town (Brown 2006:1).

In spite of the improvement on the part of the government to address the plight of refugees in SA, a lot of damage has been done and the early, unsubstantiated statements have served to fuel an already negative perception of refugees and migrants among South Africans. The common misconceptions remain, i.e. that refugees are involved in crime, especially crimes involving drugs and illegal weapons; that refugees are draining the country of social, medical and health services, thus depriving SA's own citizens and that they take jobs away from our citizens; and are therefore responsible for unemployment.

Xenophobia is largely based on unfounded myths and stereotypes with foreigners scapegoated for domestic, social and economic problems. In South Africa, foreigners are blamed for the high crime rate, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the high levels of unemployment and the lack of social services (Handmaker & Parsley 2002 :44).

It is relatively easy to blame problems on people who are different from ourselves and to demonise foreigners, but in reality, refugees can add much value to a country. It is not true that refugees take jobs away from locals. In fact the reverse is often the case. "I don't think that refugees are taking jobs that would otherwise go to South Africans," stated Fredde Jan Groot, a representative for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Pretoria, "they are starting little businesses and employing South Africans..." (cited in Timberg 2005:1).

In his article for the Washington Post on refugees in SA, reporter Craig Timberg (2005:1) cites just one of many examples of a refugee who is making a positive contribution to SA. He speaks of Axel Geraud, who fled the violence of the DRC in 1997. Geraud who holds a law degree employs three South Africans in his Internet cafe in Muizenberg.

In her opening address at the Refugee Conference hosted by the City of Cape Town in June 2006, the mayor, Helen Zille (cited in Bucher 2006:8) made the statement that, "Refugees often bring valuable skills and a vibrant culture to our city. In some cases refugees start businesses and create jobs for South Africans as well".

Although there has been a steady stream of refugees to SA in the past decade, this country remains geographically distant from the major conflict areas of Africa and it requires relatively substantial resources on the part of a displaced person to reach SA. Once in this country, asylum seekers are also required to take care of themselves, as neither the United Nations nor the SA government offers refugees in SA any form of assistance (Solomon 1996:3). The policy of the SA government since 1994 thus far has been to encourage refugees and asylum seekers to self-settle rather than confining them to camps or specialised settlements. Similarly, asylum seekers are not subject to mandatory detention, as in countries like Australia and the United Kingdom. As a result, refugees are concentrated in the major urban centres in and around SA's five major cities: Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Cape Town, largely due to the proximity of Refugee Reception Offices (RRO), which refugees and asylum

seekers must regularly visit in order to maintain their status in the country (Landau 2004:15).

2.2 DEFINITIONS IN THE FIELD OF REFUGEE RESEARCH

The number of official refugees across the world reached a 26 year low by the end of 2005. The UNHCR's *2005 Global Refugee Trends*, records a drop in the total number of refugees worldwide from 9.5 million in 2004 to 8.4 million by the end of 2005. While these statistics may seem encouraging, it is alarming to note that the overall number of people of concern to the UNHCR has increased by 1.3 million from 19.5 million in 2004 to 20.8 million in 2005. This increase is largely due to the number of internally displaced people, who live as refugees within the borders of their country of origin. The UNHCR recognizes 6.6 million people who were displaced by conflict in 16 countries globally during 2006. This is an increase of 1.2 million on the 5.4 million people displaced by conflict in 13 countries in 2005 (UNHCR 2006a:2).

To understand such statistics one needs to understand the various definitions that are used to describe people who are considered to be at risk. In the realm of refugee studies, definitions have become very important. This chapter outlines the key terms that will be used within this study. Most of these definitions are drawn from the UNHCR as well as the two major pieces of South African legislation that deal with refugees and immigration, namely the Refugee Act of 1998 and the Immigration Bill of 2002.

2.2.1 *Displaced person*

A displaced person is the general term to describe someone who has been forced to leave his/her home or native place, due to a phenomenon known as forced migration. The term first gained widespread usage during World War II and the resulting forced outflows of people from Eastern Europe. At that time, the term was used to specifically refer to a person who was forced to leave

his/her native country as a refugee, prisoner, or a slave labourer (Ogata 1992:1).

A term that is virtually synonymous with displaced person is that of a forced migrant. The term refugee is also commonly used as a synonym for displaced person, but when these terms are used interchangeably, it can create confusion between the general descriptive class of anyone who has left their home or been forced to leave their home, and the specific subgroup of legally defined refugees who enjoy specific international legal protection (Lausanne Committee 1980:1).

If the displaced person has crossed an international border and falls under one of the relevant international legal instruments, that person is considered to be a refugee. People are not only displaced by political persecution or violence. They can also become displaced due to natural or man-made disasters. While such people may be forced migrants or displaced people, there are no specific international legal instruments that apply to such individuals and their welfare remains the responsibility of the state of which they are citizens. Thus, a distinction needs to be drawn between the terms *displaced person* or *forced migrant* and the more specific term of *refugee*. The term refugee applies to a specific kind of displaced person, who has received recognition and protection under the United Nations Convention on Refugees (UNHCR 2006c:2).

2.2.2 *Internally displaced person*

A forced migrant who has left his or her home because of political persecution or violence, but does not cross an international border, is commonly considered to fall into the less well-defined category of internally displaced person (IDP), and is subject to more tenuous international protection (Crisp 2000:2).

in an article in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* that deals with the position of internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka before the 2002 cease fire and

subsequent peace process Catherine Brun (2003:1), outlines the predicament of IDP's:

People who seek refuge from conflict, but do not cross an internationally recognized border, have attracted increased attention from the international humanitarian community since the end of the Cold War. While refugees who flee the country may obtain a legal status and protection under the Refugee Convention, internally displaced persons are still under the jurisdiction of their own state.

2.2.3 *Migrant*

A migrant is a person on the move. Migrants can include any person who has moved from his/her country of ordinary residence to another country. A migrant who has fled on account of economic hardship is considered to be an economic migrant. This is a regular phenomenon in Africa, particularly in countries where there are regular droughts causing crop failure, or political instability resulting in severe disruption of the economy. An outcome of the resultant poverty, is that numbers of people leave their homes and cross national borders in search of what they would consider to be a better standard of living. A large percentage of migrants to SA come to trade or for short term work opportunities. They then return with the proceeds of their efforts to their homes (Handmaker & Parsley 2002:42).

In popular and official (mis)perception, little distinction is made between various categories of migrant. Migrants tend to get lumped into all-encompassing categories such as 'illegal aliens', 'illegal immigrants' or simply 'illegals' (Crush 2001:1).

There is much truth in what Jonathan Crush (2001:1) opines about the lack of understanding regarding the term migrant. A large percentage of people from neighbouring countries who enter SA illegally do so for economic reasons, to trade or find work. They are sometimes referred to as economic migrants. A term that is often used to distinguish between immigrants who have permission to stay in a country and those who do not, is the term undocumented migrant (Solomon 1996:5).

2.2.4 *Refugee*

According to the United Nations Refugee Convention adopted in 1951, a refugee is legally defined as:

Someone who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UN 1951:1).

A person becomes a refugee under international law once she or he crosses an international border and is assessed as meeting the definition of a refugee, either by a national government or an international agency such as the UNHCR (UN 1951:1).

A refugee is therefore any person who finds asylum in a foreign country in order to escape persecution, that is, someone who has left their country of ordinary residence because of a fear of persecution and has been granted asylum.

Individuals who have been granted refugee status are in a privileged category. It is an entitlement that allows people to move to a safe country for protection and assistance. Governments must decide to whom these entitlements should be given and how generous they should be. The broader the definition and the greater the entitlements, the more refugees will enter such a country (Solomon 1996:3).

Another way of defining refugees is to see them as a subgroup of the broader category of displaced persons. Refugees would be distinguished from economic migrants who have left their country of origin for economic reasons, and from internally displaced persons who have not crossed an international border. They would also be distinguished from people who have become displaced because of environmental problems such as drought. Strictly speaking, a refugee is someone who seeks refuge out of fear of other people as opposed to any other motivational cause (Crisp 2000:2).

In SA, the definition of a refugee as set out in the Refugee Act, draws on both the United Nations definition of a refugee and the Organisation of African Union definition of refugee status, which though it agrees substantially with the 1951 Refugee Convention, is somewhat broader and includes in its definition of refugees: “Those compelled to leave their country for reasons of external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order either in part or the whole of the country of origin” (OAU 1969:1).

The actual wording in the South African Refugee Act (RSA 1998:4) is as follows:

No person may be refused entry into the Republic, expelled, extradited or returned to any other country or be subject to any similar measure, if as a result of such refusal, expulsion, extradition, return or other measure, such person is compelled to return to or remain in a country where he or she may be subjected to persecution on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group; or his or her life, physical safety or freedom would be threatened on account of external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or other events seriously disturbing or disrupting public order in either part or the whole of that country.

This should be interpreted to include people who have come to SA because their lives, safety or freedom are threatened by war, external aggression, occupation by foreign forces, generalised violence, internal conflict, serious violation of human rights, or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order either in part or the whole of their country of origin.

The OAU, by expanding this definition to persons forced to cross national boundaries because of ‘external aggression, occupation, foreign domination and events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of their countries of origin or nationality’, was signalling a recognition of the nature and scope of modern refugee movements on the continent (Schneider 2000:1).

This broadening of the definition of a refugee in the South African context makes it possible for migrants to SA to apply for refugee status on much wider grounds than those which might apply in Western countries that stay within the narrow confines of the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees.

In *Africa's refugees: patterns, problems and policy challenges* Jeff Crisp (2000:9) makes an important point that helps us to understand the way that countries interpret the definition of a refugee:

International refugee law, it is often forgotten, has a dual purpose. On one hand, instruments such as the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention were established to protect people who were forced to leave their own country as a result of persecution, armed conflict and human rights violations. On the other hand, such conventions were established and ratified by states (not, it should be noted by UNHCR, by non-governmental organisations or by the human rights community!) with the specific intention of protecting their national interests and addressing their own security concerns.

2.2.5 *Asylum seeker*

When people leave their country of origin and apply for refugee status in another country, they are referred to as asylum seekers (RSA 1998:1). People experiencing persecution in their own country have a fundamental human right to seek and be granted asylum in another country. This right is recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN in 1948 (UN 1948:1).

The South African Refugees Act of 1998 states:

No person may be refused entry into the Republic, expelled, extradited or returned to any other country or be subject to any similar measure, if as a result of such refusal, expulsion, extradition, return or other measure, such person is compelled to return to or remain in a country where- (a) he or she may be subjected to persecution on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group; or (b) his or her life, physical safety or freedom would be threatened on account of external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or other events seriously disturbing or disrupting public order in either part or the whole of that country (RSA 1998:6).

While it is possible that someone could apply for asylum while still in their home country, claims for asylum are most often made once that person has arrived in

the host country. Such people could have entered the country illegally - as in the case of many asylum seekers in SA who cross the border without going through an official border post, or they could have entered the country legally with a short term visa and then later applied for asylum, or upon entry at a border to the country, a seaport or airport, they inform immigration officials of their intention to apply for asylum.

In SA the procedures for asylum set out in the Refugees Act, 1998 (RSA 1998:14), include:

1. An application for asylum must be made in person at a designated Refugee Reception Office.
2. When applying for asylum, an applicant must have his or her fingerprints or other prints taken in the prescribed manner.
3. Upon application, an interview will be conducted by a Refugee Reception Officer, after which the applicant will be issued with an asylum seeker's permit.
4. An asylum seeker will be issued with an asylum seeker's permit which allows the applicant to sojourn in the Republic temporarily.
5. The conditions of the permit are subject to the discretion of the Standing Committee for Refugee Affairs.
6. An application for asylum and the information contained therein is confidential and this will be ensured at all times.
7. An asylum seeker's permit lapses if the holder departs from the Republic without the Minister's consent.
8. The Minister may withdraw an asylum seekers permit if:
 - i. the applicant contravenes any conditions endorsed therein;
 - ii. the application has been found to be manifestly unfounded, abusive or fraudulent;
 - iii. the application for asylum has been rejected;
 - iv. the applicant is ineligible for asylum in terms of sections 4 or 5 of the Act.

While the South African government is tolerant of onshore asylum claims, other governments will not only refuse such claims, but arrest and detain those who attempt to seek asylum once in the country. The government of Australia, for example, has a policy of mandatory detention of all asylum seekers. Under the

Australian Migration Act, people who enter Australian territory and are not Australian citizens and who do not hold a valid visa are automatically detained (Handmaker & Parsley 2002:48).

In 2001 the Australian government introduced a policy known as the 'Pacific Solution'. Unauthorised arrivals are transferred to detention centres in other countries in the region, such as Nauru and Papua New Guinea, where their claims for asylum are processed. Those found to have a bona fide claim for asylum according to Australian migration law and pass medical and security tests are then granted a Temporary Protection Visa (Face the Facts 2005:1).

The practice of granting asylum seekers refugee status is that of offering political asylum. The most common appeals for political asylum in industrialised countries are based upon the grounds of political or religious persecution. In such cases the asylum seeker has to prove that they have been victims of religious or political persecution. Under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, a nation that is a signatory of the convention is bound to grant asylum to bona fide refugees and cannot forcibly return a refugee to their nation of origin (UNHCR 2006c:1).

The term used for returning a refugee or asylum seeker to his or her country of origin is refoulment. Industrialised countries routinely ignore or circumvent the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees. Even where it is evident that if a person or group of people is sent back to their home country, they will face imprisonment and possible death, Western governments have been known to use a very narrow definition of what constitutes persecution. The burden of proof of persecution is often placed upon the shoulders of the asylum seeker. As the asylum seeker in many cases is confined in a holding facility, they do not have access to any resources that could lend credence to their application (UNHCR 2006b:1).

One of the most fundamental criticisms of the 1951 Refugee Convention is that it is unclear on what constitutes persecution. Some regional legal instruments

such as the African Union protocols have gone a long way to include people seeking to escape generalised violence in their definition of a refugee.⁴

While there is truth in this criticism of the 1951 Refugee Convention, there is a growing tendency among governments and by the UNHCR to refer to basic human rights as the criteria for defining persecution. When taken together, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention provide the guidelines to define and evaluate persecution (Melander 1987:1).

2.2.6 Undocumented immigrant or illegal alien

Prior to 1994, South Africa was infamous throughout the world for its racialized policies and seemingly limitless measures of social control. Migration control in South Africa was in line with apartheid-era policy and has always been restrictive and security orientated, with similar origins as the notorious pass laws, as a cornerstone of the previous government's policy of influx control, which were enforced against black people in South Africa as a means of controlling domestic migrant labour (Handmaker & Parsley 2002:41).

The former South African Aliens Control Act of 1991 (Cited in Solomon 1996:1), stipulated that a person was an 'undocumented immigrant' or 'illegal alien' if they:

- enter the Republic of South Africa (RSA) at a place other than a port of entry;
- remain in the RSA without a valid residence permit;
- act in contravention of his/her residence permit;
- remain in the RSA after the expiry of a residence permit;
- are prohibited from entering the RSA; or
- become a prohibited person while in the RSA

These stipulations defining illegal aliens in SA were not only drawn up during the era of apartheid, but they are part of a piece of legislation that is rooted in the racism of an oppressive regime. This legislation was considered to be out of line with global developments and was replaced by the Refugee Act of 1998,

⁴ At the same time, there are countries that use a very narrow interpretation of the 1951 Convention as a means of restricting the number of refugees that are given refuge (Solomon 1996:2).

which has subsequently been supplemented by the Immigration Act of 2002. The term Illegal alien is now considered globally to be an offensive term and is no longer used in South African law in reference to refugees or immigrants (Smith 2003:3).

In the past, immigrants, who had no legal recognition in SA, were a concern to the former South African government. For e.g. during the 1980's large numbers of Mozambicans fled from the war in Mozambique to SA. While some were absorbed into the agricultural and mining sectors and were given some form of temporary permission to be in SA, many others resided illegally in the country (Handmaker & Parsley 2002:41).

Currently, the slow pace at which the Department of Home Affairs processes applications for asylum is creating increasing numbers of undocumented immigrants in the country. At the same time, the number of people with temporary asylum seeker permits is also growing (Algotsson & Klaaren 2004:4).

In 2005, the UNHCR conducted training sessions to equip state officials in the task of processing asylum applications. But these programs to improve the service to immigrants have been hampered by the increase in new applications (UN News Service 2005:1). At the start of 2005 there were in the region of 115 000 cases that needed to be processed. The government increased the capacity of DHA by hiring about 200 new refugee eligibility officers who are tasked with interviewing individual asylum seekers to determine if they are eligible for refugee status (UNHCR 2005:2).

2.3 WHO ARE THE REFUGEES IN SOUTH AFRICA?

2.3.1 Countries of origin

In 2000 Africans constituted 12 per cent of the global population, yet around 28 percent, i.e. 3.2 million, of the world's 11.5 million refugees and just under 50

percent, i.e. 9.5 million, of the world's 20 million internally displaced persons were to be found in Africa (Crisp 2000:1).

It is therefore not surprising that the majority of refugees coming to SA are from other parts of Africa. Shortly after the South African government opened its doors for refugees from other African countries in 1993, a steady stream of asylum seekers began to arrive in SA. While the numbers were small in the first two years, they soon picked up and between 1995 and 1998 around 20 000 people per year applied for asylum in SA. During that period, asylum seekers came primarily from Southern African countries such as Angola as well as the Great Lakes area: DRC, Burundi and Rwanda, and the Horn of Africa: Somalia and Ethiopia. Smaller numbers arrived from West African countries: Nigeria, Senegal, Côte d' Ivoire and Cameroon. A substantial number of applicants have been arriving from India and Pakistan. In June 2000 Asians made up 18% of the total applications received. Between 1998 and 2002 the majority of asylum seekers came from three countries: Somalia, DRC and Angola (Crush & McDonald 2002:3).

Since the end of the war in Angola, the number of Angolans seeking asylum in SA has dropped dramatically, but in spite of a plan to repatriate Angolan refugees, not many have returned home (UNHCR 2006b:3).

The UNHCR maintains accurate records of asylum seekers and refugees all over the globe. From time to time the UNHCR publishes the global statistics with a measure of analysis. To give a measure of perspective on the number of refugees and asylum seekers in SA, the following global figures from the UNHCR of the number of official refugees in various countries are useful for comparison with SA. Recorded are figures for the top eight refugee host countries in 2003:

Countries of Asylum during 2003

Country of Asylum	Refugees at begin of 2003	Refugees at end 2003
1. Pakistan	1 227 400	1 124 300
2. Iran	1 306 600	984 900
3. Germany	980 000	984 900
4. Tanzania	689 400	649 800
5. United States	485 200	452 500
6. China	297 300	298 400
7. Serbia Montenegro	354 400	291 400
8. United Kingdom	260 700	276 500
South Africa	23 300	26 600

Source: UNHCR 2003 Global Refugee trends (UNHCR 2004:3)

During 2003 the countries that received the largest number of new asylum applications according to the UNHCR were: France (59 800), Germany (50 600) The United Kingdom (49 400), The USA (43 300), SA (35 900), Austria (32 400), Canada (31 900) and Sweden (31 300). During the same period the countries of origin of persons seeking asylum included: Russian Federation (38 900), China (37 100), Serbia and Montenegro (36 700), DRC (35 800), Turkey (33 800), Iraq (32 100), Columbia (29 400), Afghanistan (22 400) and Nigeria (21 300) (UNHCR 2004:4).

By 2005, asylum seekers to SA had come from 65 different countries. The breakdown of countries of origin of significant numbers of asylum seekers in SA as at June 2005 was:

Bangladesh (7691), Burundi (4250), Cameroon (1510), China (4494), Congo Brazzaville (3516), DRC (21724), Egypt (1148), Eritrea (1053), Ethiopia (10535), Ghana (1461), India (6958), Kenya (10722), Malawi (6339), Mozambique (491), Nigeria (10082), Pakistan (10680), Rwanda (861), Somalia (13084), Uganda (3640), Tanzania (6046), Zambia (529), Zimbabwe (26353) (UNHCR 2006a:3).

There are far more asylum seekers in SA than refugees. At the end of 2005 there were only 29 714 people with official refugee status in SA, while there were 140 095 asylum seekers. Between January 2006 and June 2006, a further 30 735 applications for asylum were received by the DHA, bringing the total of asylum seekers by the end of the second quarter of 2006 to 167 644 (Redden 2007:2).

The alarming fact about these figures is the increase. The UNHCR has assisted the DHA with training additional staff, in particular people with legal training who can serve as interviewing officers, but the rate at which applications for asylum are processed simply cannot keep up with the numbers of asylum seekers who are coming into the country. The DHA is under considerable strain to cope with all the new applications for asylum. They have set a program in place to deal with the backlog, but the department admits that they are unable to cope with the influx of new applicants (Redden 2007:2).

2.3.1.1 Zimbabwe

The meltdown in Zimbabwe has resulted in an exodus from that country to the surrounding countries, including SA. There is no true way to know exactly how many Zimbabweans have fled to SA. As early as in 2004 newspapers were claiming numbers in the region of 2 million (Meldrum 2004:1).

In the years 2004 to 2008 there was a marked increase in applications for asylum on the part of people from Zimbabwe. According to the UNHCR, 38 percent of asylum applicants in SA during 2005 were from Zimbabwe (UNHCR 2006a:3).

One of the problems relating to Zimbabweans in SA was the initial unwillingness on the part of the South African government to recognise that they had a case for asylum here.

South Africa is denying access to political asylum to thousands of Zimbabweans seeking to escape persecution. Of the 5,000 applications for political asylum filed by Zimbabweans to date, fewer than 20

Zimbabweans have actually received political asylum in South Africa (Martin and Lari 2004:1).

According to Elinor Sisulu (cited in Meldrum 2004:1), the South African representative of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, the situation of Zimbabweans in SA is,

a problem of huge magnitude. Zimbabweans come here and go underground. These people are not being treated like refugees; they are being treated like criminals.

2.3.2 The demographic profile of refugees in South Africa

In order to minister effectively to a particular group of people it is important to understand the nature of such people: their average age, educational levels, socio-economic status and so forth. One of the most comprehensive surveys undertaken in SA to determine the demographic profile of refugees in SA was the National Refugee Baseline Survey. Commissioned in 2001 by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the UNHCR, the results of this survey were published in November 2003 by the Community Agency for Social Equity (CASE) (Belvedere, Magodie & Kimmie 2003:2).

The survey of 1500 asylum seekers and refugees was conducted in Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria. After the initial survey, focus group interviews were convened with refugees in each area in order to acquire more detail on issues raised in the survey. In-depth interviews were conducted with the Heads of the RROs and NGOs providing services to refugees in each of the areas of study in order to add to the findings from the survey (Belvedere *et al* 2003:3).

The National Refugee Baseline Survey was conducted with the following objectives in mind:

1. To obtain reliable information on asylum seekers and refugees that would enable government agencies to develop more integrated and effective policies concerning refugees. To guide various tiers of government in the areas of service provision to asylum seekers and refugees.
2. To supply the UNHCR, NGOs, service providers and other organisations working with refugees with reliable information that can assist them to identify the needs and concerns of refugees.
3. To assess where education and awareness-raising interventions are needed.
4. To raise the levels of knowledge of human rights and responsibilities of asylum seekers and refugees, and improve knowledge of and access to remedial mechanisms and facilitation services (Belvedere *et al* 2003:2).

Asylum seekers and refugees surveyed came from the following countries: Angola, Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville, DRC, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda and a few others (Belvedere *et al* 2003:50).

The survey sought to get an equal mix of male and female respondents; therefore we cannot deduce anything regarding the sex ratio of refugees in SA. The survey revealed that the average age of refugees and asylum seekers surveyed was 31 years. Just under half of those surveyed were single. If this is an accurate reflection of the refugee population, then that places them in roughly the same position as the general population of SA. It is also understandable that the majority of refugees would be under the age of 40, as younger people are more mobile and are more willing to take risks in the search for a better life (Belvedere *et al* 2003:2).

The average age of respondents was 31 years. The youngest person interviewed was 16 years old and the oldest 77 years. Almost half of all applicants were single (48%), whereas 45% were either living with a partner or married. Very small proportions of applicants were divorced, separated or widowed (Belvedere *et al* 2003:53).

As to their education levels, two thirds of those surveyed indicated that they were fluent in English. Applicants from Uganda, those from 'other countries' which include English-speaking countries (such as Liberia and Sierra Leone), Rwanda, Burundi and Angola, were the most likely to indicate that they were fluent in English. Somalis, despite the fact that they tended to have been in SAa for the longest period of time, were the least likely to be fluent in English (Belvedere *et al* 2003:55).

The survey also revealed that a large proportion of African asylum seekers and refugees are relatively well educated. Of the number surveyed, two thirds had completed a Matric or higher level of education and one third had completed some level of tertiary education. When compared with South African nationals aged 20 and over, refugees tend to have significantly higher levels of education.

22% of Black Africans in South Africa do not have any formal schooling, while only 3% of respondents in our sample indicated that this was the case. Moreover, only 5% of Black Africans in South Africa had completed tertiary education compared to 33% of asylum seekers and refugees in our sample (Belvedere *et al* 2003:56).

37 % of the respondents stated that they had been students before coming to S.A. 3% indicated they were unemployed in their home country. The rest were spread over a wide range of occupations, from traders to school teachers. Two fifths worked in a skilled or semi-skilled position before coming to S.A. Once in S.A. almost all the respondents experienced a dramatic change in their form of employment. In S.A. the percentage of unemployed rose from 3% to 24% while over half are employed in occupations requiring low skills (Belvedere *et al* 2003:57).

The average household size among the respondents was 3.5 people. (Belvedere *et al* 2003:65) The average monthly household income of the asylum seekers and refugees surveyed was R1993.00, while the average monthly per capita income was R849.00 (Belvedere *et al* 2003:70).

This survey not only reveals the demographics of refugees in SA, but it also gives an indication of the problems refugees encounter as well as their perceived needs. One issue that surfaced regularly in the survey was the perceived need by immigrants to be fluent in English. This is illustrated in the following responses by some of those surveyed:

“The problem with trying to get a job is that you must speak very good English and also Afrikaans, so it is difficult” [Female, FG Cape Town].

“There is another thing, the communication problem. I was supposed to be assisting someone, teacher’s assistant. But when they heard how I was speaking my English at that time they said ‘no, we need someone who can speak fluent English’. And it’s big problem” [Male, FG Durban].

Similarly, another participant emphasised how asylum seekers and refugees are often demeaned by the fact that they do not have a good command of English. “If you have a doctorate or a masters degree from your country you are treated like a child if you can’t speak English” [Female, FG Cape Town] (Belvedere *et al* 2003:64).

The National Refugee Baseline Survey is an extremely useful though slightly dated tool for any organisation working with refugees.

2.4 WHAT BRINGS ASYLUM SEEKERS TO SOUTH AFRICA?

“The causes of the escalating migrant movement to SA from the region are various and complex, historical and contemporary” (Crush 2001:4).

Concerning the question of immigration we must consider two kinds of forces that influence migration. On the one hand there are the ‘push factors’. Such push factors include the conditions, environment, circumstances and events that force people to consider leaving their country of residence in search of a better life elsewhere. At the same time there are ‘pull factors’ that draw refugees towards certain countries and not others, factors that cause people to travel across a number of frontiers before they actually stop and seek asylum (Crush 2001:4).

2.4.1 Push factors influencing people to leave their countries of origin

The most obvious factors that cause people to leave their place of residence are threats of persecution, violence and death. Many countries in Africa have been ravaged by civil war for long periods of time and the violence and strife has uprooted large portions of the population in a number of countries, creating not only large numbers of refugees, but also vast numbers of internally displaced people. Angola is an example of a country where the population suffered for thirty years with civil war. Many young male Angolans lived with the fear that they would be conscripted into the armies of one or the other parties in the conflict. As a result, a large percentage of Angolan refugees in SA are young men who fled enlistment into these military forces (Dreyer 2003:1).

There are thousands of asylum seekers in SA from the country of Somalia (UNHCR 2006:3). That nation has been ravaged by internal strife for many years and a sizeable portion of the population lives outside of the borders of their country. The majority of these displaced peoples are accommodated in UNHCR run refugee camps in neighbouring Kenya (Ogata 1992:2).

Accompanying civil war and political oppression is usually a degeneration of the economy of an affected country.

Lower standards of living, higher unemployment rates, political rumblings, civil war and ecological deterioration in sub-Saharan countries are all factors which push migrants from their own countries (Waller 2006:6).

The opportunities to pursue studies at a tertiary level, follow a meaningful career, earn a liveable income, and have some positive outlook on the future are hampered by instability in a country or region. A major factor that drives younger people in particular to seek refuge in another country is the possibility of a better standard of living in the host country.

Many households in Africa are increasingly turning to cross-border migration as a household survival strategy. The decision to send a

member of the family to another country is often deliberated by family members, who frequently contribute to the cost of the journey (Kihato C 2004:5).

While economic migration is not a recognised determining factor in the granting of refugee status, economic hardship remains a major push factor forcing people to leave their country of residence. At the same time, it requires a measure of resourcefulness and a measure of resources for people to travel from countries as far as the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa to SA. A large number of the refugees who come to SA were students in their country of origin and they come to SA with the hope that they can further their education in relative peace and security (Belvedere *et al* 2003:4).

2.4.2 Pull factors drawing migrants to South Africa

With the demise of apartheid and growing optimism about the new SA, African refugees have increasingly been drawn south.

South Africa receives asylum seekers from a number of what the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) calls 'refugee-producing countries' on the African continent. The total number of persons of concern to UNHCR in South Africa by 2005 was 214 000 (28 000 recognised refugees plus 186 000 pending asylum applications) (Parsley 2005:7).

There are many factors that should make SA an unpopular choice for refugees. These factors include:

1. The apartheid legacy of SA, which now lives on in the form of xenophobia towards refugees and migrants from the rest of Africa. (Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh & Singh 2005:3).
2. The fact that asylum seekers and refugees receive no assistance from the South African government. They do not receive any direct assistance from the UNHCR either. The only assistance a refugee may

receive is from faith-based organisations and NGOs that are registered as refugee service agencies and receive some financial assistance from the UNHCR. (Belvedere *et al* 2003:6)

3. There were no refugee camps in the country until the emergency safety sites were set up in 2008 after the nationwide outbreak of violence against foreigners (Timberg 2005:1). No medical facilities are reserved for refugees coming to SA and no educational facilities are reserved for asylum seekers. Essentially, refugees coming here must fend for themselves (Beauchemin 2004:1).

Added to these factors is the distance between SA and the major refugee producing parts of Africa. The conflict areas in Africa are largely in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. To get to SA, asylum seekers from these regions must travel great distances, risk many dangers and be prepared to live under extreme conditions for extended periods of time. Another factor closely related to this is the barrier of language. Few of the refugee-producing regions are Anglophone areas. For example, in the Great Lakes region the common language is French.

In spite of these and other deterrents to refugees, the numbers of asylum seekers coming to SA has been steadily increasing since the transition to democracy in SA.

There are multiple reasons why non-nationals leave home and make their way to South Africa: Conflict, poverty, violence, and persecution (political, religious, gender-based) are all reasons for leaving home, while South Africa's progressive constitution, its commitment to tolerance, and its wealth are all primary pull factors (Landau, *et al* 2005:19).

It is generally recognised that SA is the most industrialised and developed country on the African continent. In the years since democracy, the economy of SA has shown steady growth and South African exports and companies are

expanding into many parts of the rest of Africa⁵. While unemployment remains relatively high, compared to the rest of Africa, South Africans enjoy the benefits of living in an industrialised country. “South Africa’s (re)insertion into the global economy has brought new streams of legal and undocumented migrants from outside the SADC region” (Crush & McDonald 2002:4).

The perceived wealth of SA, on its own, is a major attraction to people who are under threat. They believe that in spite of the problems they may encounter, there is the possibility of a better life in here (Illunga S, Kazadi A, Mbuyi C, Nganga M, 2007 pers. comm., 19 May). Many are disappointed and become disillusioned once they have arrived in the country (see 2.5), but this does not deter others from dreaming of the opportunities that living in a country like SA presents. Many of the refugees who come to the country are resourceful people. They have an ability to adapt to different environments and to make a living on the fringes of the economy (Crush & Williams 2001b:4).

After 1990, many Africans on the continent were able to travel to SA as their governments lifted the travel boycott in place during the apartheid era. Increasing political and social turmoil on the continent in countries such as Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, DRC and Burundi, triggered the movement of people to this country, which was perceived to be relatively peaceful (Kihato 2004:6).

The euphoria of the democratic elections and the international recognition of Nelson Mandela were the initial pull factor drawing migrants to SA.

South Africa was suddenly seen as a destination of choice by many people in Africa, especially those fleeing war and persecution. The new Constitution which promised freedom and human rights, an infrastructure and functioning economy, and the presence of the towering figure of Nelson Mandela all proved attractive to many, and people began moving south (Smith:2003:3).

⁵ To name just two examples, from 1994 to 1998 SA Breweries expanded into Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and

Having surveyed some of the factors that both push and pull migrants to this country we now turn to the experience of refugees when they come to the country.

2.5 WHAT REFUGEES ENCOUNTER IN SOUTH AFRICA

“Seeking security away from the violence and persecution in their countries of origin, many refugees from other African countries find instead hostility and hardship in South Africa” (Naicker & Nair 2000:6). “They came expecting to improve their lives drastically, but are disappointed when they fail to find jobs or access social services. Doctors, engineers and teachers have had to settle for menial jobs” (Swai 2003:1).

It is worth noting that the experiences of asylum seekers in SA are by no means unique. The following quote, Nick Spencer (2004:26-27), a researcher with the Jubilee Centre in the United Kingdom, refers to the experiences of a journalist who claimed asylum in the United Kingdom, illustrates that there is not much difference in the experiences of asylum seekers in SA and the United Kingdom.

Along the way she met harassed, inept but well meaning officials, selfless volunteers, criminal gangs, and genuine applicants nervously caught in this limbo world, corrupt immigration lawyers, employers who turned a blind eye to her status and at the end some extremely angry immigration officials. The overall impression was of a system without order, method or fairness, a system that was little more than a ‘chaotic shambles’ (Spencer 2004:26-27).

If one goes by the newspaper reports and the reactions of refugees who have spoken out at refugee forums, such as the Refugee Conference held in Cape Town in June 2006, the image is generally a negative one. Listening to speaker after speaker representing the various refugee communities in Cape Town, the overwhelming sense one got from refugees living in Cape Town was one of pessimism.

Uganda. More recently, MTN has expanded to Botswana, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Rwanda,

One after the other, refugees spoke of the harsh treatment they received at the hands of Home Affairs officials, and the rough treatment many have received from the police services. They spoke of long waits and even refusals at state hospitals and xenophobic attacks coming from South Africans on certain sectors of the refugee community. Others referred to the difficulties of finding accommodation and work in this country. A handful of speakers at that conference spoke of their gratitude to SA for receiving them and allowing them to live in relative freedom in this country. Some chastised their fellow refugees for their negative attitudes and reminded them of the conditions they had escaped back home. Naturally the city spokespeople tried to present the conference as a successful operation in terms of dialogue between refugees and residents (Brown 2006:1).

The overall representation of what asylum seekers encounter in SA remains a negative one. What follows is a summary of five areas where people seeking refuge in SA experience serious problems. These include: the process of applying for asylum; the difficulty of obtaining and maintaining the necessary documentation to stay in SA; corrupt officials; arrest and deportation; and xenophobia. Under the section on xenophobia, the researcher will document a personalised account of his own experiences in caring for displaced foreigners during the xenophobic crisis of May and June 2008.

2.5.1 Applying for asylum

The piece of legislation which governs the lives of all people applying for asylum in SA is the Refugee Act of 1998. This legislation came into force in 2000 and has been hailed in some quarters as a progressive piece of legislation that is way ahead of most other refugee hosting countries (Palmary 2005:2). On the other hand, it has been criticised for being very complex and as such provides asylum seekers with a whole series of problems (Crush & Williams 2001b:12). “There is a dichotomy - while the government may have good policies, its

Swaziland, Uganda and Zambia.

bureaucrats don't always apply it properly" (Nicolas Bwakira former head of the UNHCR in SA, cited in Chetty 2000:1).

On entry into SA the Refugee Act requires asylum seekers to register at one of the five RROs. These have been set up in the major urban areas of the country and not at points of entry. While all foreigners have the right to seek asylum and to have their application considered in a way that is fair and equitable, the fact that the RROs are situated far from the borders of the country, leaves asylum seekers vulnerable to arrest and deportation between the borders and the main urban areas (Landau *et al* 2005:14).

The Department of Home Affairs acknowledges that the sheer volume of applications for asylum currently overwhelms them. While the process is meant to take six months, applicants routinely wait for years before they receive a decision from the department (Handmaker 2002:2). The backlog of applications is a major concern to both the UNHCR and the South African government. It creates a tremendous amount of stress on the asylum applicants, as they are caught in the no-man's land of being an asylum seeker and as such they do not have the protection of the UNHCR as refugees. They cannot put down any roots in the country, as the outcome of their application remains in doubt (Handmaker 2002:2).

To get an idea of the size of the backlog, according to a UNHCR report published in October 2006 entitled, *Trends in Refugee Status Determination*, SA had 140 095 asylum applications pending at the start of 2006. Between January 2006 and June 2006, a further 30 735 applications for asylum were received at the DHA RROs. Of the total number of cases 2986 were finalized in that period, 265 received refugee status and 2721 applications were rejected. By June 2006, 167 644 applications for asylum were still pending. This is an increase of 20% over the six month period January to June 2006 (UNHCR 2006:2).

Refugee advocacy groups assert that the total number of asylum seekers could well be considerably larger as the number of people in the queues waiting to

make their initial application are extremely high at all five of the RROs (Redden 2007:2).

Once at the RRO, the applicant for asylum must communicate with the Refugee Reception Officers. This is problematic as many foreigners do not speak any of the official languages of SA. The Department of Home Affairs does not provide interpreters to assist asylum seekers in making their initial statement. Freelance interpreters, operating on the fringes of the RRO provide this vital service. These interpreters are most often foreigners themselves, who have some proficiency in English and charge asylum seekers for assistance. If an asylum seeker reaches the head of the queue and they are unable to speak in the language of the Refugee Reception Officer, they are often instructed to go back outside and find an interpreter.

Once the applicant has the opportunity to apply for asylum, he or she has to make a statement regarding the reasons why they are applying for refugee status in SA. These hastily set out initial statements are one of the most common reasons for the rejection of applications by asylum seekers. This system is often chaotic and is open to abuse and corruption (Belvedere *et al* 2003:19).

The researcher has often listened to the anguish of asylum seekers, who have told of how when they first made their statement they did not understand the questions that were being put to them by the interviewing official. As a result, when they had to go to subsequent interviews, it looked as if they had now changed their story and were making a false statement.

One example is of a man and his wife who entered the country at different times. When the wife arrived, she was asked whether she was married. She misunderstood the officer as asking whether her husband was with her and so she replied in the negative. She received a temporary permit, pending the outcome of her asylum application, on which her marital status was given as 'single'. In the meantime the husband arrived in the country with their four children. The husband stated that he was married and that his wife was already

in SA. When the wife was re-interviewed, she stated that she was married. As a result of this confusion, she was refused asylum, because of the conflict in her statements. The husband and children on the other hand have received refugee status. The wife was given thirty days to lodge an appeal or she must leave the country (Kolony D, 2007 pers. comm., 6 April).

The RROs are so busy dealing with the backlog of applications that they limit the screening of new applicants to one day per week. The result of this is long queues and an applicant must often return to the RRO many times before they can make their application. This makes such people vulnerable to arrest and deportation as they do not have any papers (Handmaker 2002:2).

Once a person has applied for asylum, they receive a Section 22 permit which is valid for between one and three months. The permit entitles the asylum seeker to live, study and work in SA. Because of all the delays in the current system, asylum seekers have to return to the RRO every one to three months to have their temporary asylum seekers permit renewed. The permit must also be renewed at the office where the application was initially made. Renewing a permit involves long queues, returning more than once and can result in the asylum seeker losing their job. Having to return to the office of first application can also cause problems if the asylum seeker has moved to another city (Tlou 2006:2).

2.5.2 Obtaining and maintaining the required documentation

A problem that is closely related to the process of applying for asylum is that of obtaining and maintaining the required documentation. It is essential for people living in SA to have the correct documentation. For asylum seekers and refugees this is particularly problematic.

For a refugee or asylum seeker to get work, access minimal social services and avoid arrest and deportation, they need the correct documentation. Employers are reluctant to recognise asylum seeker permits as they are simply a sheet of

paper. Most banks refuse to allow asylum seekers to open bank accounts. People with official refugee status can apply for a maroon refugee identity document or the new smart refugee identity card, however these take a long time to be processed (Parsley 2005:10).

Discussions with refugees reveal that cases often take three or more years during which they must actively push their applications. In follow-up interviews, many respondents report having to pay bribes to DHA officials or to private security guards just to enter the city's refugee reception centre (Landau & Jacobsen 2004:2).

The complex legislation as well as an overtaxed Home Affairs Department places a large amount of stress upon asylum seekers. Until they receive the prized refugee status, they live in constant fear of rejection and being deported. Newspaper reporter Stephen Timm, stated in an article entitled, *Cape Town - refugee haven or hell:*

For many refugees living in South Africa will mean yet another fight for survival. Their battle will not be against warring rebel soldiers or rioting clans, but against their host country's police force and Department of Home Affairs (Timm 2003:1).

In his article, Timm (2003:1) introduces his readers to Dassin Makombo, a 26-year-old musician and refugee from the DRC, who in 1998 fled his home country through Zambia and Namibia, travelling on foot and by minibus to Cape Town. For two years Makombo waited for a decision by the DHA on whether he would be allowed to stay in the country. He received asylum only after he was assisted by a local lawyer.

Many other asylum seekers are not so fortunate. Less than 15 percent of all asylum seekers are granted the two-year renewable refugee permit. Those who are rejected are given 30 days to lodge an appeal and if the appeal fails, they have fourteen days to voluntarily leave SA, failing which they are deported from the country (Human Rights Watch 1998:1).

2.5.3 Corrupt officials

In February 2005 the Cape Times exposed corruption at the Cape Town RRO. It was alleged that so called 'agents' were demanding between R300 and R350 from asylum seekers in order to assist them to obtain an asylum seeker permit. The 'agents' were believed to be working in collusion with certain Home Affairs officials (Mannak 2005:1).

A Special Assignment (SABC 2005) programme on SABC 3 screened on the 6th of September 2005 documented corruption on the part of police officials in Gauteng. Policemen from the Booyens Police Station rounded up foreign looking people and then proceeded to demand bribes from the individuals or their family members and friends before they would release them. Where people are desperate to obtain papers permitting them to live and work in SA, the situation will always be ripe for corruption.

2.5.4 Arrest and deportation

An issue that has been highlighted in the press, on radio and TV is the arrest and deportation of undocumented migrants. While much is being done on the part of refugee advocacy groups, there are many reports of unlawful arrests, imprisonment in the notorious Lindela repatriation camp and deportation of foreigners to neighbouring countries.

The Lindela repatriation centre in Krugersdorp south west of Johannesburg serves as a central holding centre for undocumented migrants prior to repatriation back to their countries of national origin. Indeed, Lindela is the largest detention centre for undocumented migrants in the country and is the only facility specially designated by the DHA for that purpose (Algotsson & Klaaren 2004:10).

A person will often be arrested because they have a dark skin colour or do not speak one of the major South African languages. South African citizens have

also found themselves in Lindela and then deported to neighbouring countries simply because they have a dark complexion (Algotsson & Klaaren 2004:9).

Among the refugees that the researcher works with, there are regular instances where people are stopped by the police and asked to produce their papers. The researcher and associates from the church have had to respond to a number of cases where asylum seekers have been arrested because they either did not have their papers on them or the papers had expired (Malawayi G, Mukendi D, 2008 pers. comm., 14 June).

The Lindela repatriation centre has been the subject of a Ministerial Committee of Inquiry due to the large number of people who have died in the centre. The committee made a number of findings⁶ and recommendations regarding conditions at Lindela (Tlou 2006:1).

2.5.5 *Xenophobia*

Perhaps the greatest negative experience waiting for asylum seekers who come to SA is xenophobia.

Xenophobia, although a contested term, is widely defined as the irrational fear of the unknown, the fear or hatred of foreigners by nationals against non-nationals (Handmaker & Parsley 2002:44).

The xenophobia that refugees in this country experience is based largely on perceived racial characteristics such as skin colour or language. Given SA's recent history with apartheid and the deep-rooted racial divides that still have an impact upon South African society, the racial character of xenophobia towards refugees is extremely disturbing. Foreigners are targeted largely because they look or speak differently to South Africans. Abeda Bhamjee (cited in

⁶ These findings included the high number of deaths in the Lindela Repatriation Centre, the lack of adequate medical facilities and the problem of unaccompanied minors being housed at the centre (Tlou 2006:6).

Beauchemin 2004:1), a legal counsellor for refugees at the Law Clinic of Witwatersrand University, states: "Over the past four years we've had a high amount of foreigners thrown off trains and foreigners having acid thrown into their faces"

Many different reasons have been posed as to why there are such high levels of antagonism on the part of South Africans towards fellow Africans from the rest of the continent. Some blame the fact that SA was isolated from the rest of Africa due to apartheid.

We have very little experience and appreciation of our commonness with the rest of the continent It's actually funny how xenophobia is played out because even South Africans have been deported to Lesotho, Swaziland and other countries because their skin colour is considered too dark (Abrahams cited in Beauchemin 2004:1).

The decades under white domination in the country have left scars that run deep into the fibre of our society.

We've always been a society divided in terms of an 'us and them' ideology. And post-apartheid, our nation-building process is exactly around that. It's an inclusive process for South African citizens and an exclusive process for non-citizens (Bhamjee cited in Beauchemin 2004).

Xenophobia is by no means a South African problem. It is a growing problem throughout the world, including other parts of Africa. This might seem strange, as African people, especially more traditional African societies, have been renowned for their hospitality towards strangers. This generosity has included welcoming and sharing their often inadequate resources with people they do not even know. This is however no longer true in many parts of the continent (Adepoju 2004:3).

Xenophobia, hatred and intolerance against foreigners has mushroomed in Africa. Once renowned for the generous and hospitable manner in which it received refugees and foreigners, refugees and foreigners now often find that they have more to fear from the ordinary citizens than from agents of the state (Handmaker & Parsley 2002:44).

Xenophobia is also fuelled by stereotypes of foreigners. In SA, it is not uncommon to hear things like, “Zimbabweans steal jobs; Nigerians deal drugs; Somali merchants force local shops out of business with cut-rate prices” (Calvert 2006:1).

While xenophobia is a problem all over the world and is not unique to SA, here attitudes towards foreigners, in particular those coming from other parts of Africa, seem to be getting worse not better. According to a 2004 study by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), one in five South Africans want a ban on new immigrants and two-thirds back strict limits (Calvert 2006:1).

One factor that contributes towards the problem of xenophobia include the high unemployment rate in SA. While the economy is growing at a steady pace, unemployment affects poor, uneducated people who seek to make a living through informal street trading. A large percentage of asylum seekers in SA are also involved in the informal economy, even though 80 percent have a minimum of 12 years of schooling and 40 percent have a university degree. As a result there is competition for the same market. The foreigners, due to their higher levels of education are often at an advantage and this creates frustration and anger among locals (Belvedere *et al* 2003:2).

Many locals view refugees as economic parasites. This negative perception is 'validated' in that refugees do compete with locals for resources and jobs, which are in scarce supply for the majority of SA's poor (Naicker & Nair 2000:6).

During 2006 the violent deaths of over 30 Somalis in various parts of the Western Cape brought xenophobia into the spotlight in Cape Town (Ismail 2006:1). In the same year in Masiphumelele, a township in the False Bay area of Cape Town, a number of shops owned by Somalis were looted and many of them burned to the ground. Many of the Somalis were forced to flee, in what they believed were efforts by local South African business rivals to eliminate them from the area (Ndenze & Roberts 2006:1).

A matter of interest in these incidents that occurred in Masiphumelele is the fact that it was the local Baptist church that intervened on behalf of the refugees and provided members of the Somali community temporary accommodation until they could find more permanent accommodation. Two Baptist pastors, Rev John Thomas and Rev Philip Moksen were instrumental in bringing members of the Masiphumelele business community and leaders of the Somali community together in order to find ways to bring an end to the attacks on Somali businesses (Ndenze & Roberts 2006:1).

The UNHCR, in partnership with the SA National Consortium on Refugee Affairs, has been seeking ways to bring about a shift in South African attitudes towards refugees. A broad based programme called the *Roll Back Xenophobia Campaign* was launched in 1998. This campaign specifically targeted government departments, the police and the media (NCRA 1998:1).

Attitudes are changing slowly but obviously it's taking time. There are still levels of downright ignorance in the government, especially amongst staff like receptionists (Pumla Khulashe of the UNHCR cited in Beauchemin 2004).

At the Refugee Conference convened by the City of Cape Town on International Refugee Day in June 2006, the Mayor of Cape Town admitted that part of the solution to ensuring the wellbeing of refugees is to ensure the wellbeing of all the people in the city. The mayor also noted that while xenophobia is to be found in all sectors of society, it is felt more acutely in those portions of society where poverty and unemployment is a major factor. Where people are struggling to realise the basics in life, such as a liveable income, permanent shelter and so on, they are easily threatened by any form of competition for these scarce resources (Brown 2006:1).

2.5.5.1 ***The 2008 xenophobic crisis in South Africa***

In May 2008, the issue of xenophobia in SA hit the international news headlines with the outbreak of violence directed towards foreigners that began in Gauteng and within a week had spread to Cape Town.

At least 62 people died, 670 were injured, and more than 1300 people were arrested. About 100 000 people were displaced, according to estimates from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Kapp 2008:1).

As early as 1995, Human Rights organizations were warning of dangerously high levels of xenophobia in SA. In 1998 the SAHRC and the NCRA in consultation with the UNHCR, launched the *Roll Back Xenophobia Campaign* in an effort to deal with the rising incidence of attacks against foreigners. The focal issues for the campaign in 1999 included: the violence against foreign hawkers; the violations of the rights of migrant workers; the plight and rights of refugees and asylum seekers; the conduct of police and civil servants in dealing with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants; the media coverage on refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and the role of education in combating xenophobia (NCRA 1998:1).

In 1998, the Human Rights Watch produced a document with the title, *PROHIBITED PERSONS - Abuse of undocumented migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees in South Africa*. The document opens with this statement:

Although South Africa, since the first democratic elections in 1994, has made remarkable progress towards establishing a free and democratic society based on respect for the human rights of its own citizens, foreigners have largely failed to benefit from these developments and remain subject to serious abuse. Anti-foreigner feelings have also increased alarmingly (Human Rights Watch 1998:1).

While there have been improvements in a few areas, such as the media coverage on refugees and the conduct of police in certain areas, the human

rights violations reported by the Human Rights Watch are very similar to the events that occurred during May 2008.

A xenophobic climate in South Africa has resulted in increased harassment of migrants. Many people interviewed by Human Rights Watch described how they had been verbally abused by South Africans, and told to "go home." In some cases, verbal abuse led to physical attacks. In the township of Alexandra near Johannesburg, for example, Malawian, Zimbabwean and Mozambican immigrants were physically assaulted over a period of several weeks in January 1995, as armed gangs identified suspected undocumented migrants and marched them to the police station in an attempt to 'clean' the township of foreigners. Similar but less extensive incidents continue to occur regularly in South Africa, and foreigners have received little protection from the police and other institutions (Human Rights Watch 1998:3).

During May and June of 2008 around 20 000 foreigners were displaced from their homes in Cape Town. Large numbers of displaced foreigners were housed in community halls, churches, mosques and even private homes as ordinary people in Cape Town responded to the crisis.

On the morning when the violence against foreigners broke out in Cape Town, the researcher was summoned to the Bellville police station and requested by the police and local council to assist with providing logistical support for the police and local government officials. The Bellville Baptist Church was in a good position to do this because they have not only been providing services to refugees for a number of years, but have a number of members who are refugees themselves and could speak most of the languages of the people who were displaced. The local authorities were unable to provide shelter for the displaced foreigners and it fell to us to accommodate an estimated 1500 displaced people who had fled to Bellville as it was perceived to be a safe area (Meeting with local authorities at Bellville Police Station, 23 May 2008).

Using the network of pastors in the local ministers fraternal, the researcher was able to place the displaced foreigners in church halls in the Bellville area. The majority of these people were Somalis and because they were Muslims, they were not comfortable with being accommodated in churches. Alternative

accommodation had to be found for them (Mohamed K, pers comm., 31 May 2008). That left around 250 displaced people from approximately twelve nationalities that were accommodated for a period of five weeks in three church halls: Bellville Baptist Church, Bellville Methodist Church and Bellville Presbyterian Church. With the Bellville Presbyterian Church as an operational centre, a team of volunteers got to work in seeing to the needs of the people living in the halls.

Through the network of churches in the Bellville area, the team of volunteers grew until there were shifts of people assisting in providing meals, capturing data, distributing clothing and other basic necessities. Local doctors and nurses provided their services, local businesses assisted with things like food, toiletries and portable toilets. Favourable reporting in local newspapers increased the awareness of the general population in the area to the plight of the displaced foreigners (Van der Walt 2008:1).

In the political arena, a war of words erupted between the Democratic Alliance, who controlled the city and the African National Council who controlled the provincial government. The dispute raged over how best to deal with the crisis. The city proposed to place as many refugees as possible in large camps established at existing council-owned holiday resorts located in relatively remote areas like Kommetjie, Atlantis and Strandfontein. The province favoured utilising community halls and other city-run facilities that were closer to the places where the foreigners worked. The result of this political row was a stalemate that prevented the local arms of government from coming up with any medium term solutions to the xenophobic crisis (Van Gass 2008:1).

The large beach camps proved to be problematic and a number of incidents including attempted hunger strikes and threats towards volunteer workers revealed that conditions in these camps were problematic (Kapp 2008:2).

While the church sites did not have the problems that faced the larger state-run sites, they had to face the reality that the government might not come up with a plan to resolve the crisis. The only solution that officials could give was either to

repatriate people to the country of origin or to re-integrate them into the communities that had expelled them in the first place. While the option of re-integration seemed successful in some areas, there were reports of foreigners being attacked when they attempted to go back to the places they had fled in others (Prince & Mnyakama 2008:1).

In some instances, repatriation was an option and working in co-operation with the Mozambique Consulate in Cape Town, the churches in Bellville assisted in the repatriation of twelve people from Mozambique. A number of the Zimbabweans in the church halls also requested repatriation. While the team managing the care of the refugees were not happy with this, they insisted and the churches assisted them in returning home. Of the eleven people that were repatriated to Zimbabwe, seven returned a week later with stories of being beaten or intimidated upon reaching Zimbabwe (Maturenga J, Mafuala D, 2008 pers. comm., 11 Aug.)

Commenting on the plight of Zimbabweans who had been arrested and sent back to Zimbabwe in the aftermath of the 2008 xenophobic crisis, the UNHCR regional spokesperson (cited in Gerardy 2008:1) stated, "South Africa has sent 17000 Zimbabweans through the Beit Bridge border post in the past 40 days". This after the South African government in the person of Home Affairs Minister had given the UNHCR assurances that illegal immigrants would be exempt from deportation until things had quietened down after the xenophobic crisis in 2008. "Given the situation in Zimbabwe now, no one can deny that people are at risk," observed Dr Lauren Landau (cited in Gerardy 2008:1) director of Forced Migration Studies at Wits University.

While the South African government was criticised for failing to protect foreigners against xenophobic attacks, as well as failing to respond appropriately to the crisis that ensued, NGOs and faith-based organisations were praised for their response. Typical of the criticism against the government was an article in the respected British medical journal *The Lancet*, with the title: "South Africa failing people displaced by xenophobia riots" (Kapp 2008:1).

In an article “Paranoid policy of migration control is not the answer”, in an eight page supplement to the *Cape Argus* on 17 June 2008, titled, *Never Again*, Vincent Williams (2008:5), a migration policy analyst with SAMP writes:

The level of xenophobia that we have seen in South Africa is in part caused by the migration policy and rhetoric that painted migrants as a burden on South African society, even if such policy is not explicitly written or codified. For any alternative policy to succeed, government will have to provide leadership, rather than have its policy prescribed by popular sentiment... critical to the policy development process is the need to redirect public opinion on the matter of migration so that it is understood and welcomed as positive and beneficial.

The outbreak of xenophobic violence in May 2008 and the five weeks spent in very close proximity with displaced foreigners every day, brought home to me the fact that the issue of refugees is more than just an ethical debate, in many cases it is a matter of life and death.

2.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has set out the phenomenon of asylum seekers and refugees in SA, as well as some of the conditions they encounter in the country. While the South African government through its various departments have the most to do with refugees, namely Home Affairs and Safety and Security, they are not able to address the needs and concerns of the refugees. Local government bodies like the city of Cape Town may be reasonably sympathetic to the plight of refugees, they do not have the capacity to cope with the problems associated with refugees along with the needs of South Africans. Migrants and poorer South Africans often compete for scarce resources, resulting in rising levels of xenophobia (Naicker & Nair 2000:6).

One of the problems facing refugees in SA does not stem from external factors, rather from themselves. This is their oftentimes stubborn refusal to make an effort to understand South African society (see below). Where refugees have

successfully integrated into South African society, they find life to be much better than those who resist integration.

An example of integration is the Angolan community in the Northern suburbs of Cape Town. Many Angolans have successfully integrated with the local people, to the extent that a good number of those who left Angola, fleeing the war, are employed in good jobs and have even obtained permanent residence in SA. While there have been occasions when Angolans were attacked while living in informal settlements, where they became integrated with South Africans in urban and peri-urban areas, the incidences of xenophobic attacks against Angolans decreased. The same was true during the xenophobic violence in May 2008. Refugees living in urban areas in Cape Town, rather than townships or informal settlements were largely unaffected (Kalipa 2008:8).

On the other hand, where refugees resist integration and refuse to learn to speak English or other local languages, they can become isolated and are more vulnerable to xenophobia. This problem was well articulated by Professor Kole Omotoso of the University of the Western Cape who was a keynote speaker at the 2006 Conference on Refugees in Cape Town. Professor Omotoso took the refugees to task for not making an effort to understand the history of the struggle for freedom in SA. He emphasised that integration of the refugee community into the broader South African community was vital for their own success and wellbeing (Brown 2006:1).

There are relatively few organisations that can effectively assist refugees with integrating into South African society. The UNHCR is adept at setting up refugee camps and providing a legal framework that seeks to protect refugees from human rights violations. Such camps keep refugees and locals apart from one another and in any case do not apply in SA. At the same time the laws that ensure the rights of asylum seekers and refugees do not provide them with actual protection from the xenophobic words and actions of locals. Refugee advocacy organisations do an excellent job of raising the awareness of the plight of refugees both to the government and the media; however they are not in a position to facilitate integration of refugees with ordinary South African

citizens. South African government agencies, such as the Police and Home Affairs cannot be involved in integration.

Two groups of organisations are well placed to effectively promote integration of refugees. One group consists of the educational institutions in SA. Here refugees can freely mix with South Africans on a relatively equal footing. This is particularly true for university and college students as well as children of refugee families who attend local schools. An example is one of the families in our congregation, the Kolony family. While the parents can hardly speak any English, their five children are not only fluent in English, they speak Afrikaans and Xhosa. They have adapted well to the South African school system and have made friends in Bellville South where they live. One daughter, Blondelle, as a grade 7 learner at the Goeie Hoop Primary School in Bellville South, was chosen as a prefect in the school. The other daughter, Rosaline was chosen to play a lead role in the church Sunday school end of year production (Kolony D, 2007 pers. comm., 6 Feb.).

However, as well positioned as schools may be to promote the integration of refugee learners into South African society, they are not in a position to integrate the parents. Added to this, a large percentage of refugees and asylum seekers are young adults who are not married and do not have school-going children (Belvedere *et al* 2003:2).

That leaves just one group of organisations with the manpower and resources to be effective in integrating refugees into society. This group consists of the faith-based organisations. For e.g. where a refugee joins a local Christian congregation, they are in a position to make friends with local South Africans. They also learn to express themselves in English or one of the other South African languages.

Not only do churches have a great potential to provide care and a non-threatening environment for refugees, they remain the best-placed portion of South African society to protect refugees from xenophobia and integrate refugees into South African society. As people worship together, study the

Scriptures and pray together, as they serve one another and have meals together and fellowship with one another, barriers are broken down and understanding is built. In this process, not only are refugees integrated into society, but a small army of anti-xenophobia workers is built up.

It has been a great joy to see this occur in the context of a local congregation. New home cell groups are created in the congregation to facilitate integration, South African church members get involved in the special occasions of refugees such as weddings and refugees have spend time in South African homes. Refugees and locals work together on common projects, such as gospel outreaches into the community and building projects. Special ministries, including English classes and computer training have been established to assist refugees to integrate and find work. In the English classes for example, the teachers, who are all volunteers, use the lessons to expose new arrivals to SA to various aspects of South African culture and history (Vine R, 2008 pers. comm., 8 July).

Sadly, many churches that are situated in close proximity to large concentrations of foreigners do not realise what a blessing they can be to the refugees and do not welcome them. As a result, refugees establish their own congregations, which in turn become ghettos where the refugees become isolated from South African society and integration becomes more difficult.

One reason why churches may not reach out and welcome the strangers in their area could be due to negative attitudes towards foreigners that may be found among the members of the congregations. This study seeks to address such xenophobic attitudes within the ranks of Baptist congregations in SA by highlighting the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in the South African context and presenting a biblical understanding of how Christians should respond to foreigners in our midst.

While it recognises the work being done to improve the lot of refugees and asylum seekers by NGOs, as well as the efforts of certain sectors of government, this dissertation seeks to emphasise the role that the church can

play. The media, NGOs, schools and other organisations can make a difference in changing attitudes of South Africans towards foreigners, but churches, the most widespread volunteer organisations in the country, have the potential to welcome and receive strangers in a way that many other organisations are not able.

It is also possible through the regular teaching from pulpits and in small groups around the country to educate large numbers of people regarding the biblical teaching about how to treat refugees and foreigners. This view is shared by the NCRA, the umbrella body that represents most of the NGOs that work with refugees in SA. In their *Roll Back Xenophobia Campaign* the NCRA calls on “religious organisations to raise awareness and facilitate local integration through seminars, workshops, sermons, joint cultural activities, and joint skill ventures” (NCRA 1998:1).

3 BAPTISTS AND REFUGEES IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.1 BAPTIST PRINCIPLES AND HOW THEY RELATE TO MINISTRY TO REFUGEES

In the preface to the book, *Being a Baptist*, C W Parnell states:

Baptist Principles are not primarily concerned with our own historical tradition. They are concerned with the person of Jesus Christ and His will for His church today (Parnell 1980:5).

Parnell (1980:5) points out that people went to prison and were even put to death for holding to principles such as believers' baptism or the separation of church and state. In those days, Baptist congregations were distinctive from other church groupings, in particular those church denominations which were aligned with the state. While many of the distinctive features that historically distinguished Baptist congregations from other denominations have become

somewhat blurred, there remain certain features which have historically been distinctive features of Baptist churches. At least, it is by means of these features, known in Baptist circles as Baptist Principles, that Baptist churches identify themselves within the broader spectrum of Evangelical churches (Parnell 1980:5). The Baptist Principles that have a bearing on this study include:

- The Direct Lordship of Christ over every believer and over the local church;
- The Supremacy of Scripture in the Local Church;
- Believers' Baptism;
- The Separation of Church and State;
- The Autonomy of the Local Church
- The Congregational Principle.

It was for these and other Baptist Principles that many of the early Baptists and their Anabaptist predecessors became aliens and refugees in the lands of their birth. By insisting upon the supremacy of the Scriptures and the right of ordinary believers to read and apply them, Baptists in the seventeenth century, faced the wrath of the medieval church. By refusing to have their children baptised as infants, Anabaptists in the previous century faced both the wrath of civil authorities, as well as the state churches (Yoder & Kreider 1977:399).

By 1540, Anabaptists had formulated a body of beliefs that was widely held by Anabaptist groups across Europe (Yoder & Kreider 1977:400). These included a commitment to Christ that went beyond the acceptance of doctrines to a daily life that was consistent to the teachings of Christ. They also rejected violence, including both going to war and defending themselves from persecution. The Anabaptists were devoted to the re-establishment of the church into a family of faith where all the members were believers and decisions were made by the whole membership. They took decisions regarding the interpretation of Scripture based upon the agreement of the local assembly of believers and not on church tradition or ecclesiastical leaders.

A further distinctive of the sixteenth century Anabaptists was their understanding of the separate spheres of the church and the state. They insisted that the state had no place in determining the affairs of the church, nor could the state coerce people to become Christians. They rejected the concept of a Christian nation and set about with vigour to preach the gospel wherever they went (Yoder & Kreider 1977:400-401).

The Anabaptists also believed that the church was distinct from society, even if society claimed to be Christian. Christ's true followers were a pilgrim people; and his church was an association of perpetual aliens

It was these principles that brought Anabaptists into conflict with both the official churches and the governments of the countries where they lived. This resulted in persecution from both Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Their view of baptism was seen as especially problematic because it appeared to destroy the foundation of Christian identity. Infant baptism was the rite that served to include the child in the community of grace, faith and salvation. Denial of it was perceived as a denial of Christianity and of Christian society (Bingham 2002:124).

For about a quarter of a century, Anabaptists were mercilessly persecuted. Catholic and Protestant authorities executed thousands of Anabaptists who refused to retract their beliefs (Yoder & Kreider 1977:402). Some of the groups that survived the persecution during this period came under the leadership of Menno Simons and became the spiritual ancestors of the Mennonites. Others sought refuge in Moravia, under the guidance of Jacob Hutter. Another group in Switzerland and Southern Germany were known simply as 'the brethren' but "over the centuries, these descendants lost many of their Anabaptist characteristics" (Yoder & Kreider 1977:403).

3.1.1 The Direct Lordship of Christ

The principle of the Direct Lordship of Christ, also known as the “First principle of Baptists” (Parnell 1980:8), forms the basis of the majority of the other Baptist principles and is stated as follows in the BUSA Statement of Baptist principles (BUSA 2007:377):

The Direct Lordship of Christ over every believer and over the local church. By this we understand that Christ exercises His authority over the believer and the local church directly, without delegating it to another.

This principle has a bearing on the way that local Baptist churches make decisions and undertake ministry. In holding that Christ exercises his authority directly over the local congregation, Baptist congregations do not submit to the leadership of bishops or other hierarchical church structures. The local congregation must interpret the will and direction of Christ in its own context. Parnell (1980:8) quotes J D Freeman, who at the first Baptist World Alliance Congress in 1905, stated, “What distinguishes Baptists as a family is our acute and vivid consciousness of the authority of Jesus Christ, and of His direct, personal, and undelegated authority”.

This principle of the Direct Lordship of Christ within His church does not prevent a congregation from seeking the advice of leaders within the BUSA or territorial association, nor does it rule out the possibility of such leaders proposing a programme of action for local churches. Rather, it emphasises the importance of the local church seeking the will of Christ as He has revealed His will in the Scriptures.

3.1.2 The Supremacy of Scripture

The Principle of the Supremacy of Scripture, while not found in the Statement of Baptist Principles, is the first article in the Baptist Statement of Belief, passed by the BUSA Assembly in Durban in September 1924 (BUSA 2007:375):

We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in the original writings as fully inspired of God and accept them as the supreme and final authority for faith and life.

This first article of faith has a bearing on the fact that Baptist churches are best motivated when there are scriptural grounds for a certain course of action. Henry Cook (1961:19) states in his book, *What Baptists stand for*:

This is the fundamental Baptist position. With this belief in the supremacy of the New Testament, Baptists always begin, and from it they draw all their conclusions”.

It is the researchers conviction, based on over 20 years of pastoral ministry and 10 years of working within BUSA structures, that Baptist churches will not be motivated to reach out in compassion to refugees, unless they can be persuaded from Scripturally that this is the right thing to do (Cook 1961:26). That is one of my primary reasons for seeking to develop a biblical theology of ministry to refugees; to set out Scriptural reasons why it is important for Christians and local congregations in particular Baptist congregations to minister to refugees.

3.1.3 Believers' Baptism

The question of baptism has long been a contentious issue in the Christian church. It reaches to the heart of what it means to be a part of Christ's followers. “A Baptist church, by its presentation of Believers' Baptism, claims more emphatically than any other to be built up of convicted men” (Robinson 1960:5).

R W Southern (1970:18) deals with the issue of baptism within the context of church and society in the Middle Ages:

In baptism the godparents made certain promises on behalf of the child which bound him legally for life. From a social point of view a contractual relationship was established between the infant and the church from which there was no receding. For the vast majority of members of the church baptism was as involuntary as birth into a

modern state, with the further provision that the obligations attached to baptism could in no circumstances be renounced.

When this understanding of baptism was challenged by the Anabaptists and later the Baptists, no amount of reasoning from the Scriptures could dissuade both the leaders of the Reformation and the Catholic Church that such a view could be allowed to take root. In 1529, the Diet of Speier legislated that any person who had been re-baptised or who re-baptised someone else could be put to death without a trial (Renwick 1958:116). The understanding that baptism is reserved for those who have personally repented of their sin and put their faith in Christ had to be eliminated with deadly force if necessary (Bingham 2002:124).

Early Baptists in the American colonies also faced a measure of persecution for their convictions. For example, John Clarke was jailed for his convictions on religious liberty and believers' baptism (Vedder 1969:294). As the number of Baptists grew, this provoked further attempts to suppress their views, but by 1680 this persecution of people expressing Baptist convictions had come to an end (Vedder 1969:299).

While Baptists are no longer persecuted because of their adherence to the baptism of believers, this experience of persecution and alienation from society on account of their belief provides an historical point of identification on the part of Baptists and refugees. Persecution because of one's religious beliefs is a ground for receiving political asylum today. While it is doubtful that many of the asylum seekers who have come to SA have fled their homelands due to persecution on religious grounds, there is enough experience of alienation and persecution in the early history of Baptists for us to empathise with those who seek refuge in our midst.

3.1.4 The Separation of Church and State

This principle goes back to the time of the Anabaptists and can possibly be traced even further in the history of the Christian church to the Donatist

movement in North Africa during the reign of Constantine in the fourth century (Bruce 1958:297). Coming out of a period of persecution, the churches in North Africa struggled with the question of what to do with those who had succumbed to pressure and denied Christ. A number of congregations in North Africa objected to the appointment of Caecilian as Bishop of Carthage in 312. One of the reasons for this was they believed that he had handed over copies of the Bible under threat of persecution (Bruce 1958:297).

Robinson (1960:45) refers to the Donatist movement as a “Puritan protest”. He goes on to state that, “they contended that the continuity of the Christian church lies in holy persons, rather than holy institutions” (Robinson 1960:45).

When Constantine intervened on behalf of Caecilian and sought to suppress the Donatists opposition, their response took the form of the rallying call, “What has the emperor to do with the church?” (Wright 1977:203).

While the Donatist appeal to the separation of the emperor from the affairs of the church may have been motivated to a certain extent by “a strong nationalist element” (Bruce 1958:297), it was the backdrop against which Augustine developed his doctrine of the church. This inclusive view of the church, where church and state were seen working together, dominated the ‘official’ understanding of the church as well as church/state relationships for more than a thousand years (Bruce 1958:297).

It was in the sixteenth century that this interconnectedness between the state and the church was seriously challenged by the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists can be seen as following in a line of former movements, such as the Paulicians of the seventh century, the Bogomils in the tenth century (Renwick 1958:97), the followers of Peter of Bruys in the twelfth century, and the Albigenses and Waldenses of the thirteenth century (Robinson 1960:57).

While the doctrines of these groups differed, they shared a common desire for a biblical faith and a Christian life that was marked by simplicity and separation

from the world. The majority of these groups faced persecution by the Roman Catholic Church (Renwick 1958:98).

The Anabaptists, following on the desire for a biblical faith, objected to any form of alliance between the state and the church (Renwick 1958:115). They insisted,

upon the separation of church and state. Christians they claimed were a 'free, unforced, uncompelled people'. Faith is a free gift of God and the authorities exceed their competence when they 'champion the Word of God with a fist' (Yoder & Kreider 1977:401).

Following the pattern of the Anabaptists, Baptists have been outspoken about state interference in the affairs of the church. They have equally resisted the church's involvement in the affairs of state. The great reformers, Luther, Calvin and Zwingli could not conceive of the church apart from the state and they branded as heretics those who stood for a church that was not tied in any way to the secular government (Stratton 1941:86).

The Baptist understanding of separation of church and state was influenced by the sixteenth century separatist section of the Puritan movement, as well as a similar movement in the Netherlands.

As the English authorities repressed Puritanism more severely and systematically, the dissenters were often forced to find refuge abroad. The Dutch were tolerant of religious nonconformity, and allowed English refugees to come in freely (Sprunger 1977:389).

It was out of this separatist movement that found refuge in the Netherlands that the first English Baptists, under John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, emerged at the start of the seventeenth century (Renwick 1958:113). While Smyth and Helwys had close ties with the Dutch Mennonites, by 1638 there were also other Baptist congregations that had emerged from the separatists within England itself.

These youthful Baptist churches were hurled into the current debate about the relationship between church and state. They championed their own particular views at great personal cost (Briggs 1977:394).

The suppression of Baptists in England, along with other separatist church groups, came to an end with the victory of the forces of Oliver Crowell. Baptists once again faced persecution in England from 1660 when the monarchy was restored under Charles the Second. The best known Baptist leader to be imprisoned during this period for the crime of 'preaching without a licence', was John Bunyan (Renwick 1958:160).

The principle of the separation of church and state was established upon the suffering of the early Baptists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and it should stand as a reminder to all Baptist congregations in SA of their obligation to reach out in compassionate ministry to those who have fled oppression for the freedom of a democratic SA. Just as the English Separatists found refuge in the Netherlands and were welcomed and encouraged by the Mennonite Brethren, so Baptists in this country can be of great service to Christians who are vulnerable foreigners to our shores.

3.1.5 The Autonomy of the Local Church

The principle of the Autonomy of the Local Church speaks to the fact that no outside body or denominational structure can dictate to the local Baptist congregation. The BUSA does not view itself as a national church; rather it is a voluntary union of autonomous local churches. Each local congregation within the BUSA "is fully autonomous and remains so notwithstanding responsibilities it may accept by voluntary association" (BUSA 2007:377).

While autonomy is not the same as being independent, in some cases it amounts to independence. Baptist churches in South Africa are particularly diverse as far as theological positioning, worship styles, cultural and linguistic

expressions and ministry models are concerned.⁷ As a result it is not possible to speak of a typical South African Baptist church. While some churches may be similar, for example, they may hold to a Reformed or Calvinistic understanding of God, man and salvation, they may have very different models of ministry or may express that theology in very diverse cultural settings. Other Baptist congregations may look and sound similar in their style of worship, but they may differ in their understanding of evangelism and missions⁸.

The principle of the autonomy of the local church also means that while the BUSA Assembly or the WPBA Council may take decisions and present recommendations to the churches that are in association with them, those churches may or may not go along with such recommendations. The BUSA cannot mandate any particular model of ministry or any particular ministry at all.

Baptists have Associations of churches in an area, and Unions, or Conventions of churches in a country. They also have a Baptist World Alliance – but these bodies are the servants of the local church, not the masters (Parnell 1980:26).

3.1.6 The Congregational Principle

The Congregational Principle relates to the way a local congregation is governed internally. This principle has developed over a number of years from an older principle of Congregational church government. In the Statement of Baptist Principles, the Congregational Principle appears as a somewhat complicated and wordy principle covering both the government of the local church and the roles of the members and leadership:

⁷ Such diverse groupings include pastors and member churches that adhere to a Calvinistic view of salvation as well as groups that hold to an Arminian view. There are churches that hold to a cessation view of the gifts of prophesy and tongues, while other congregations practice these gifts. There are congregations that ordain women and those who refuse to ordain women. Baptists in South Africa come from all population groups and include most of the major language groups in the country.

⁸ One area of diversity involves the call to salvation in evangelism. Some churches include an altar call at the close of the message, other churches would never use such a device in evangelism, relying upon the work of the Holy Spirit to draw people to Christ. In the area of missions, some congregations draw a clear distinction between local evangelism and foreign missions, whereas others see work done beyond the borders of SA as a part of evangelism.

The Congregational Principle, namely that each member has the privilege and responsibility to use his/her gifts and abilities to participate fully in the life of the church. We recognise that God gifts his church with Overseers (who are called Pastors or Elders) whose primary function is to lead in a spirit of servant-hood, to equip and provide spiritual oversight, and Deacons whose primary function is to facilitate the smooth functioning of the church. This principle further recognises that each member should participate in the appointment of the church's leaders, and that constituted church meetings, subject to the direct Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture, is the highest court of authority for the local church (BUSA 2007:377).

This principle recognises that the local congregation, and not any outside body or small internal group, is responsible for the appointment of leaders in the local congregation. For example the BUSA Ministerial Settlements Committee may, if requested, recommend one or more pastoral candidates to a local church when they have a pastoral vacancy, but the local church is under no obligation to act on those recommendations. The duly constituted meeting of church members remains the highest court of appointment and appeal among Baptists. The WPBA Executive or Council may recommend to a local church that they consider a ministry to refugees, that Executive or Council has no means to enforce such a recommendation, nor would they wish to enforce such a recommendation, as to do so would be in violation an essential Baptist principle that has stood the test of almost five centuries.

These Baptist principles need to be kept in mind as we seek to explore what the BUSA, the WPBA and local Baptist churches are doing in regard to ministry to refugees. It needs to be understood that even if the BUSA Assembly passed a motion that encouraged ministry to refugees there is no guarantee that any churches will follow those guidelines. An example can be found in the 2001 BUSA Assembly in Hilton. The National Assembly passed a resolution regarding HIV/AIDS, which stated among other things:

We exhort our church members, adherents and all fellow Christians: To walk before God in holiness and purity, to repent and abstain from sexual sins. To demonstrate the love and compassion of Christ to all those with HIV/AIDS, to help them in every way possible and not to despise or discriminate against them. To open their hearts and homes to AIDS orphans, as far as they are able in order to provide love and

care for them. To teach and promote biblical family and sexual values at church and community level (BUSA 2002:376).

This resolution and the discussion and testimonies associated with it resulted in a number of local churches getting involved in a range of AIDS ministries, but the total number of churches in the BUSA that have AIDS ministries remains a relatively small proportion of the total number of member churches.

Each local congregation needs to consider its own situation and resources and decide whether it will respond to such resolutions and decide a) whether it will respond to such resolutions and b) how it will implement them. Over the years BUSA Assemblies have passed hundreds of resolutions covering a wide range of issues, but this does not necessarily result in ministry at local church level. While local churches generally follow the recommendations issuing from the deliberations and decisions coming out of annual BUSA Assemblies, this cannot be taken for granted.

While certain resolutions of the BUSA Assembly, once they are agreed upon, become instructions from the National Assembly, which consists largely of representatives from the congregations to the BUSA structures⁹, other resolutions are recommendations from the Assembly to the local congregations¹⁰. Where the Assembly agrees to give instructions to the BUSA Executive or some other constituted arm of the BUSA, such as the Missions Department or the Baptist Colleges, then those bodies are bound by the Assembly to implement such directives.

⁹ For e.g. the churches might agree at a National Assembly to call the BUSA Executive to set up a commission to investigate a certain matter, such as a new leadership structure for the BUSA.

¹⁰ Such a recommendation could include suggestions on certain clauses that are recommended for inclusion in the local church constitution, or for the churches to consider participating in a particular programme.

3.2 BAPTIST CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND MINISTRY TO REFUGEES

This section deals with the way that Baptist churches in SA are presently ministering to refugees. Most of the content of this chapter comes from personal interaction with people in the BUSA, both at the level of the BUSA Executive and the local church. In terms of local churches, the research has been confined to the churches of the WPBA. This is where the researcher is presently serving as a pastor. The researcher has also served in various leadership positions in the WPBA, which has not only given me access to the churches, but also provided me with a good understanding of the workings of the association.

The purpose of this section is threefold:

1. To discover what the BUSA is doing in regard to ministry to refugees in SA. This includes agencies of the BUSA, such as the BUSA Executive, the annual BUSA Assembly and the Baptist Seminaries.
2. To examine more closely what is happening in the WPBA as far as ministry to refugees is concerned.
3. To outline how local churches affiliated to the WPBA are ministering to refugees. It will also set out the different models of ministry that churches are using in reaching out to refugees.

3.2.1 The role of the Baptist Union in ministry to refugees

The BUSA had its origins in immigration to SA. The first Baptist congregations in the country were established by English 1820 Settlers who were settled in the Algoa Bay region. A further group of Baptists came to SA with the German settlers who were also settled in the Eastern Cape region (Hudson-Reed 1977:24). In 1877 the BUSA was formed in Grahamstown, with representatives

from four English congregations: Alice, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown and Cape Town, and one German congregation: King Williams Town, which had a number of branch works under its care (Hudson-Reed 1977:24).

While the first Baptists in SA were not refugees per se, they were migrants and had settled in a strange and often hostile environment. For example, the first Baptist church building in the settlement of Salem was destroyed in a flood (Parnell 1980:90). In the face of the initial hardships, the congregations that were established provided a refuge and an identity for many of these immigrants to Africa.

The BUSA has taken a position on many moral and social issues in SA, but up until 2008 it had not established an official position in relation to refugees. There have been no statements or discussion at Annual BUSA Assemblies concerning refugees to SA or the Union's role in relation to them. There is no specific person or group within the BUSA structures responsible for ministry to refugees.

However, at the 2006 BUSA Assembly, held in East London one Assembly session was given over for delegates to attend one of eight elective sessions on the Saturday afternoon. One of these electives was a seminar conducted on the topic of, *Reaching refugees with the Gospel* (Stemmett 2006a). At the same Assembly in 2006, during a sitting entitled, *God at work – Spotlight on current issues*, a brief report was given to the Assembly on ministry by some Cape Town Baptist churches to a community of Angolan refugees in Pomfret in the North West Province of SA, as well as advocacy work being done on behalf of this community (BUSA 2006:105).

The report came as a result of the plight of this community being brought to the attention of the Officers of the BUSA. The researcher wrote to various government departments (Stemmett 2006b, c, d) and received no response. He then wrote to the World Baptist Alliance (Stemmett 2006e) and other international Baptist bodies (Stemmett 2006f) to inform them of the situation of the community of Angolan refugees in the North West Province of SA who were

under threat of forced removal. While the appeals to various government departments concerning the Pomfret community were not answered; however, when the General Secretary of the World Baptist Alliance (Lotz 2006) wrote to the relevant South African government minister seeking clarity on the position of the people of Pomfret, he received a prompt reply (Moremi 2006).

As far as the researcher is aware these are the only two instances where the issue of refugees and ministry to refugees has come before the BUSA National Assembly.

3.2.2 The role of the Baptist Union Executive

The BUSA Executive consists of the Officers of the Union, namely the President, Vice-President, Ex-President, the General Secretary, elected representatives from each of the Territorial Associations of the Union, and representatives from the various boards and ministries of the BUSA. The BUSA Executive meets regularly during the year to implement decisions of the Annual BUSA Assembly and to conduct the on-going business of the Union (BUSA 2007:391).

In recent years, the BUSA Executive has addressed the issue of refugees only in relation to the ministerial status of students graduating from South African Baptist Seminaries (BUSA 2004:6). At the BUSA Executive meetings held in Pretoria in March 2004, there was a brief debate in the Ministry Board meeting about the status of refugees. A question was raised concerning a graduating student at the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa, Randburg, who was a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The BUSA Executive debated whether the student's name should be placed on the Candidates List of the BUSA ministry lists. The minute recording the debate read as follows: "The issue of foreign students seeking accreditation needs to be investigated" (BUSA 2004:6).

In subsequent discussions concerning students in a similar position, the Ministry Board of the BUSA Executive has agreed that only graduates who have legal status in the country will be admitted to the list of Candidates for Ministerial Recognition (BUSA 2007:405).

The position regarding applicants to the lists of Probationer Ministers, Student Ministers and Fully Accredited Ministers is much the same (BUSA 2007:405). Where a local church calls an individual who is a refugee in South Africa and that person qualifies under the BUSA regulations governing recognition for ministry, the refugee status of the individual will not prevent that person from being placed on the relevant BUSA ministry list (BUSA 2007:405).

As BUSA churches are autonomous and the ordination of a minister rests with the local church, a local Baptist congregation is free to call whomever it wishes to serve on pastoral staff. In practice, however, many BUSA churches have a clause in their constitutions, which requires the pastor(s) to be on one of the BUSA lists of Accredited Ministers. As a result, the exclusion of a qualified pastor from the BUSA ministerial list could result in such a person not being eligible for a call to many Baptist churches in SA (BUSA 2007:404).

At present, there are a number of refugees who have successfully completed their studies at the various Baptist Seminaries. Some of these graduates have applied to go onto the BUSA ministerial lists and have been successful in their application and are on the lists of Candidates for Ministry and the list of Probationer Ministers (BUSA 2007:185).

3.2.3 The role of the Baptist Colleges

At present there are three BUSA institutions that provide training for potential Baptist ministers in SA, namely the Baptist Theological College in Randburg, the Cape Town Baptist Seminary and Christ Baptist Seminary in Polekwane. The last is linked to the other two institutions and provides training for pastors in the Mapumalanga and Limpopo Provinces of SA as well as students from neighbouring states like Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The training institutions of the BUSA are registered with the Department of Education and Training and all

applicant students have to comply with the regulations set out by the department.

Under the present legislation (RSA 2003:11), people who are registered as asylum seekers or who have received refugee status in SA are allowed to work and study in the country. The Colleges therefore also seek where possible to assist foreign students to obtain the necessary documentation required for study in SA. There is no specific financial assistance available for students who are refugees. Rather, all students have equal access to the various bursaries that are available. The future pastoral ministry of students with refugee status lies in the hands of local churches. The Seminaries cannot guarantee that any graduate will receive a call to pastor a church.

While enrolled for studies at one of the Baptist Colleges, students are required to be involved in ministry with a local congregation under the supervision of a local pastor. At the Cape Town Baptist Seminary, in the student's final year, the second semester is given over largely to a practical internship programme where the student is placed under the guidance of a local pastor. This practical pastoral experience has given refugee students a measure of exposure to ministry in local churches. As a result of such ministry some foreign students have gained the trust of local churches and have been called to be the pastor of the church where they served as a student. An example of this is the Living Waters Community Church, a Baptist congregation in the suburb of Richwood in Cape Town. A foreign student was serving in the church and when the pastor retired, the student, who had subsequently graduated, was called as the pastor of the church (Pedro B, 2007 pers. comm., 16 August).

3.2.4 The role of Western Province Baptist Association (WPBA)

The WPBA is one of seven¹¹ Territorial Associations in the BUSA. While the Territorial Associations co-operate and work closely with the BUSA, they are

¹¹ The other Territorial Associations include: The Baptist Association of the Northern Cape, The Baptist Northern Association, the Border Baptist Association, the Eastern Province Baptist Association, the free State Baptist Association and the Natal Baptist Association.

constituted independently and have their own leadership and ministry structures. The history of the WPBA goes back to 1917, when a group of Baptist congregations in Cape Town came together to form the Cape Peninsula and District Baptist Association (Hudson Reed 1983:170). At first this association was led by a steering committee, but as the WPBA developed it was able to call its own full-time co-ordinator to be responsible for directing the co-operative ministry of the churches in the Association. Presently, due to financial constraints, at present only two of the Territorial Associations employ full-time co-ordinators, namely the Northern Baptist Association and the Western Province Baptist Association (BUSA 2007:217).

The churches affiliated to the WPBA send representatives to quarterly Council Meetings, where association business is conducted. Each association elects a Vice President and Executive members at the Annual General Meeting. The Vice President becomes the President of the association at the following Annual General Meeting. The Executive meets on a monthly basis to execute the decisions of the association Council (WPBA 2006a:1).

From 2000 to 2005, the item of refugee ministry appeared regularly on the agenda of the WPBA Council Meetings as well as the WPBA Executive Committee (WPBA 2003a:4). On most occasions it has appeared in connection with two Portuguese Baptist congregations situated in Goodwood and Parow respectively (WPBA 2003a:4). These congregations were first established in the 1970's to serve Portuguese-speaking people living in Cape Town. The Portuguese-speaking population at the time consisted of immigrants from Madeira as well as Portuguese refugees of European origin who had fled from Angola (Hudson-Reed 1983:301).¹² The white Portuguese-speaking members of both congregations began to decline in the 1990s and some of the remaining members began to reach out to other Portuguese-speaking people in Cape Town. As a result, both of these congregations are now made up mostly of refugees from Angola.

¹² Initially there was only one Portuguese speaking Baptist congregation, located in Goodwood. In 1999 a Dutch Reformed congregation serving the Portuguese speaking people in the

The pastor of the Goodwood Portuguese congregation came to SA as a refugee from Mozambique. He completed his ministerial training at the Cape Town Baptist Seminary, married a South African woman and has subsequently obtained permanent residence in the country (Vilankulu A, 2006 pers. comm., 24 June). The pastor of the Parow congregation is a Brazilian national, who is serving in SA as a missionary to Portuguese-speaking people (Balanuic, C, 2006 pers. comm., 12 Feb.). Both of these Portuguese-language congregations are autonomous and to some degree self-sufficient. They have a distinct character, which is a combination of the traditions developed by the initial congregants and the influence of the Angolan refugees. Worship in these congregations is vibrant and lively. The songs used in worship are a mixture of Portuguese, Kimbundu and English (Vilankulu A, 2006 pers. comm., 24 June).

Initially when the issue of refugee ministry was raised at the WPBA Executive meetings it related to the needs of these two congregations which were regarded to be the WPBA outreach to refugees in Cape Town (WPBA 2003a:4). The matter of ministry to refugees has also been mentioned in WPBA forums in connection with a home established by the WPBA in conjunction with the Hope Now Foundation in the United Kingdom to care for Angolan orphans (WPBA 2002:1). Some of these children were living at the Ark, a place of safety situated in Faure in the Western Cape. Their parents were among Angolan refugees who were killed in violence directed at foreigners in the informal settlement of Da Noon near Tableview. Other Angolan children were taken into the home after they were found on the streets, having come into SA without their parents, or having been abandoned by their parents or the adults who accompanied them to SA. Initially the daily administration of this orphanage was in the hands of the Goodwood Portuguese Baptist Church, with funding coming from the Hope Now Foundation. The administration of Rainbow House has since been transferred from the Hope Now Foundation to the WPBA, while funding from the United Kingdom continues, but decreases every year (WPBA 2002:1).

Northern Suburbs of Cape Town became a Baptist congregation and was accepted as a member of the BUSA and Western Province Baptist Association.

More recently, a much wider ministry to refugees has been discussed at WPBA Executive meetings (WPBA 2003b:2). In 2003 a portion of the Annual Christmas offering of the WPBA churches was allocated to refugee ministry. The money raised was used mainly to provide resources for churches that are comprised mainly of refugees or are ministering to refugees. These resources included Bibles in Portuguese and French, as well as discipleship and training materials in those languages (WPBA 2003b:2).

In January 2004, a group of four pastors and two seminary students, from churches seeking to minister to refugees met at the offices of the WPBA. After a measure of discussion, it was decided to request a French-speaking graduate from the Cape Town Baptist Seminary to assist in co-ordinating the ministry to refugees in the Western Cape (Meeting with pastors 29 January 2004). As it transpired, the person in question was not available to help with the work in the Western Cape and there have been no further efforts to co-ordinate ministry to refugees at an association level (Meeting with pastors 29 January 2004).

All the initiatives regarding ministry to refugees have had the support of the current Area Co-ordinator of the Western Province Baptist Association, Rev Clive Jacobs. (Jacobs C, 2003 pers. comm., 16 Nov.). He is very aware of the refugees living in the area served by the WPBA and is in regular contact with three Baptist congregations in the Association that comprise primarily of refugees. He is also aware of churches that are ministering to refugees. He is supportive of these ministries and also supports the need for biblical material that can help Baptist churches in the Western Cape to take a more active role in ministry to refugees (Jacobs C, 2005 pers. comm., 06 Feb). In spite of the concerns of the WPBA Area Co-ordinator, the level of ministry towards refugees remains at a low level, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

3.2.5 Churches in the Western Province Baptist Association

2006 the Western Province Baptist Association consisted of 129 churches and fellowships¹³ which are divided into 9 sub-regions. The majority of these churches are situated in the Cape Town metropolitan area, while 26 congregations are situated in the Southern Cape, West Coast, Boland, and other outlying areas (WPBA 2006a:3).

In order to measure the level of ministry to refugees among WPBA churches, the researcher felt that it would be helpful to poll the churches in some way or other. There was also a need to ascertain the level of awareness of refugees in churches of the WPBA and compare that to the levels of ministry to refugees by Baptist churches. What was needed was a simple instrument that could measure both the level of awareness of refugees and the level of ministry to refugees. The researcher decided on four questions that could be posed to church leaders. The questions had to be direct, easy to understand, and answerable with a simple yes or no answer. The researcher is aware that such a questionnaire is not completely reliable as a yes or no answer can hide a lack of understanding of the question. As it was important to get some basic data, it was decided to go ahead with the short, four-question questionnaire.

The questions were as follows:

1. Are you aware of refugees living or working in the community served by your church?
2. Do you have refugees attending or visiting church services or other church activities?
3. Does your church have any ministries directed specifically to refugees?
4. Do you have any church staff members who work specifically with refugees?

These questions were addressed to Baptist church leaders in a number of ways in order to generate the maximum number of responses. The leaders, either the pastors or, in the cases where a church did not have a pastor, a member of the

¹³ Churches are defined as self-supporting congregations, whereas a fellowship is under the care of the Association or one or more churches.

church leadership, were asked to give their honest answers to the series of 4 questions.

Churches with email facilities were sent an email to which they were requested to reply. Others were contacted over the telephone and the questions were asked over the phone. Others were asked to answer the questions at a WPBA Council Meeting held in Milnerton in May 2006. The questions were circulated to all those attending and a representative from each church was requested to fill in the answers for each question and return them at the close of the meeting (WPBA 2006b:3).

In total, 112 of the 129 WPBA churches responded to the questions. Where duplicate answers from different representatives of the same church were received, these were cross-checked to see if they gave the same answers. In every case where duplicate answers were received the answers were the same. The answers from all the sources and methods were collated to give a comprehensive response.

The results of the four-question questionnaire were as follows:

1. 70.5% (79 of 112) of church respondents were aware of refugees living or working in the community served by the church
2. 27% (30 of 112) of church respondents have refugees attending the activities of the church.
3. 5% (6 of 112) of church respondents have ministries directed specifically towards refugees.
4. 4% (4 of 112) of church respondents have staff members who work with refugees.

The results of the survey indicate that there is a relatively high level of awareness (70.5%) of refugees among the churches of the WPBA

Further questioning of the respondents who indicated that there were refugees linked to their churches revealed that refugee participation ranged from Sunday worship services and Bible study groups to youth groups.

With regard to ministry directed towards refugees, the situation was very different. Only 5% of church respondent have any form of ministry directed towards refugees. This is in stark contrast to the 27% of WPBA church leaders that are aware of refugees that attend the activities of their congregations. Even fewer churches have any staff members who work with refugees (4%).

It also needs to be noted that of the 112 church respondents to the questions, two are congregations that consist primarily of refugees. These are the congregations in Goodwood and Parow that have been mentioned above. In these congregations, almost all of the activities and ministries are directed towards refugees and the staff members (pastors) of these churches work almost exclusively with refugees. This accounts for half of church staff in WPBA churches who work directly with refugees.

Of the rest of the Baptist congregations in the Western Province Baptist Association, in 2006, there were two church staff members who work directly with refugees. Of these, one is a refugee who graduated from the Cape Town Baptist Seminary in 2005 and has been called to serve as the International Pastor of the Bellville Baptist Church. The other is a French-speaking missionary serving with Operation Mobilisation who has been seconded to the Cape Town Baptist Church to work with French-speaking refugees in the Cape Town City bowl area.

The results of this survey indicate that while there is a high level of awareness of refugees among Baptist congregations in the Western Cape, by 2006 this had not been translated into ministry towards refugees. This would indicate that not only is there is a) a gap between awareness of refugees and ministry to refugees in many Baptist congregations in the Western Cape, and b) there is also a need for churches to be informed and equipped to minister to refugees.

More positively, there is rising interest and concern about ministry towards refugees on the part of some churches; where refugees regularly attend Baptist churches, the pastors and members of such congregations become aware of the special needs of these people. Even in the process of conducting the survey, a number of church leaders asked about the possibilities of ministering to refugees.

Subsequent to the survey in 2006, at least two other Baptist Congregations affiliated to the WPBA have introduced some level of ministry to refugees.

3.2.6 Models of ministry to refugees in WPBA congregations

Among the churches that are currently ministering to refugees there are a number of discernible models of ministry that are being employed. It is unlikely that these models of ministry were adopted in any deliberate or pre-meditated way; rather they followed the general pattern of ministry in those churches. These patterns of ministry have most likely been the way these congregations have been doing ministry since they were established. In examining the various ways that congregations work with refugees, there are at least three distinct models of ministry to refugees to be found in WPBA churches:

1. Separate congregations made up almost entirely of refugees.
2. Two congregations that utilise the same worship facilities.
3. Integrated congregations, where refugees are treated in the same way as all other people in the congregation.

3.2.6.1 Separate congregations

Historically, this is the method that Baptists have used to plant churches and establish new congregations. This type of congregation, which consists of one particular group of people, goes back to the days of apartheid, when it was against the law to have people of different races in the same congregation. The apartheid laws of segregation affected the way that Baptists planted new

churches and the way in which they ministered to people of different races. Missionaries went out to people of other races and as people were converted they were gathered into congregations. The missionaries trained people to lead the congregation and when the indigenous leadership was in place the missionary took on a more distant, superintending role (Hudson-Reed 1983:302). This is the model that has been followed in the two Portuguese speaking Baptist congregations in Cape Town, namely Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo and First Portuguese Baptist Church, Goodwood.

Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo (Portuguese Congregation of the Cape), began as a Dutch Reformed congregation that was established by the missionary arm of the Dutch Reformed Synod in the Western Cape (De Araujo J, 2006 pers. comm., 11 April). It was established in response to an influx of white Portuguese-speaking refugees who came to SA from Angola in the 1970s.

One of the early leaders of this congregation, Mr Jose de Araujo, was a former member of the Portuguese Air Force who had been converted to Protestant Christianity after leaving Mozambique when that country became independent from Portugal. He was born in Oporto in Portugal and came to Mozambique during the war between Portugal and the Mozambican liberation forces. After Mozambican independence Mr de Araujo served in the South African Air Force and then in related industry. He completed some theological training through the Dutch Reformed Church and worked alongside Dutch Reformed ministers who had served as missionaries in Mozambique and Angola and were fluent in Portuguese. The congregation obtained a church building in Frankfurt Street, Parow, and the Dutch Reformed Synod financed the building of a house for the missionary pastor on a vacant plot adjacent to the church buildings (De Araujo J, 2006 pers. comm., 11 April).

From the 1970s to the 1990's, Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo consisted almost entirely of Portuguese-speaking people of European origin. The congregation was represented on the Dutch Reformed Synod by its missionary pastors. When the last Portuguese-speaking Dutch Reformed pastor retired from the Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo, the congregation was already in decline. Only four

or five of the original families were still attending the church (De Araujo J, 2006 pers. comm., 11 April).

During the mid-1990s there was a second influx of Portuguese-speaking migrants into Cape Town. This time they were Angolan refugees who had escaped the civil war that ravaged their homeland. One of the remaining leaders of the Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo, Mr Fernando da Conceicao saw the opportunity of reaching these fellow Portuguese speaking people with the gospel. He was successful in reaching a number who subsequently joined the Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo (da Conceicao F, 2006 pers. comm., 17 April).

Without pastoral leadership, the now growing congregation turned to various sources for help. The Dutch Reformed Synod was unable to supply them with either a minister or preachers who could speak Portuguese so they appealed to their former leader, Mr de Araujo, who at the time had retired and was planning to return to Portugal. He suggested that they make contact with the Brazilian Baptist Convention and request that they send a missionary to help the church, as they had done at the Portuguese Baptist Church in Goodwood (De Araujo J, 2006 pers. comm., 11 April).

One of the conditions that the Brazilian Baptist Convention placed on sending a missionary was that the Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo became a Baptist church (da Conceicao F, 2006 pers. comm., 17 April). This was a relatively easy step for the congregation, as the links with the Dutch Reformed Synod had grown very tenuous. After some negotiation, the Synod graciously donated the church property, including the large house to the newly established Baptist congregation (da Conceicao F, 2006 pers. comm., 17 April). In 1999 the Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo became a member of the BUSA and a member of the WPBA (Igreja do Cabo 2005:5).

Under the leadership of a young Baptist missionary from Brazil, Rev Cleber Balaniuc, the congregation grew, creating a haven for Angolan refugees living in Cape Town. By 2005 the church had a total membership of 134 (Igreja do Cabo 2005:5). The majority of these members are Angolan refugees who had come

to Cape Town since 1996. While there was a measure of tension between some of the longstanding Portuguese members of European descent and the newcomers from Angola, careful handling of the situation by the missionary pastor averted any major problems.

The missionary pastor instituted a training programme to equip potential Angolan leaders and in time these young leaders began to take their place on the church council and the diaconate. By 2005, the eldership consisted of the Brazilian missionary pastor, three men of European descent and two Angolans. The diaconate consisted of twelve deacons who each held a specific portfolio on the church leadership. All twelve deacons were refugees from Angola (Igreja do Cabo 2005:5).

One of the members of the congregation who benefited from the training programme instituted by the missionary pastor is Mr Jose João Zamba. Jose came to Cape Town from Angola in 1996. A few years later he met Mr Fernando da Conceicao of Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo who gave him a Bible and invited him to come to church. He entered the training programme and got involved in evangelism and leading Bible study groups. He was appointed to the leadership of the church and in 2002 sensed a call to full time ministry. In 2003 Jose enrolled at the Cape Town Baptist Seminary and graduated at the end of 2006 (Zamba J, 2007 pers. comm., 23 May). Jose has since been called as a missionary to Angola. He has been accepted as a BUSA missionary by the Baptist Missions Department and will be serving in Angola alongside the Baptist Convention of Angola (Neumann 2007:24).

Another example is Mariana Lourenco, who came to Cape Town from Angola in her late teens. She started visiting the church because she felt she needed to make good friends. She heard the gospel and responded to the call to repent and trust in Christ and was baptised. She entered the discipleship training course as well as English language classes. Her ability to work with children was soon recognised and over a number of years Mariana was trained as a Sunday School teacher. When the missionary pastor's wife was no longer in a

position to lead the Sunday School, Mariana was the natural choice to succeed her as leader of the Sunday School (Lourenco M, 2006 pers. comm., 16 Aug).

At present, the primary target group of the church remains Portuguese-speaking people from Angola and Mozambique. In 2005 the UNHCR had on record over 13000 Angolans living in SA (UNHCR 2006b:3). This remains a large community from which the Portuguese language congregations draw their membership. Some of these Angolan refugees have married South Africans and the congregation now has a more multi-cultural composition, with portions of their Sunday services being translated into English. Whereas a few years ago the church offered English classes to assist its members to find employment in Cape Town, the need at present is for Portuguese classes in order for the children in the congregation to maintain contact with their roots (Gumerais L, 2006 pers. comm., 16 Aug).

One of the distinct characteristics of a church that caters largely for refugees is the sense of transience. The people are constantly on the move. They move from one rented accommodation to the next and from one job to the next job. In the forefront of the minds of many in the congregation is the question of returning to Angola (da Conceicao F, 2006 pers. comm., 17 April). With the end of the thirty-year civil war in Angola, there has been a trickle of Angolans who have returned to Angola under the voluntary repatriation agreement. Between 2003 and 2005, around 345 000 Angolan refugees, mostly from Zambia, DRC, Namibia and Congo returned to Angola. There has not been a similar response from the Angolans living in the country and relatively few have taken advantage of the repatriation agreement.

Mass voluntary repatriation of Angolan refugees has not taken off as expected. Given the refugees' general lack of interest to return home, the majority of the 13,000 Angolans in South Africa are likely to remain in the host country for the foreseeable future (UNHCR 2005:3).

This means that the Portuguese-speaking congregations still serve a vital need in the Angolan community of Cape Town.

The First Portuguese Baptist Church, situated in Goodwood was established by Jose de Araujo in Bellville in the 1980's. Mr de Araujo, a leader of Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo, became convicted of believers' baptism and he and his family were baptised. He resigned as a leader in the Dutch Reformed Church, joined the Bellville Baptist Church and continued his studies through the correspondence programme of the Baptist Theological College. He continued his evangelism ministry and started a Portuguese congregation attached to the Bellville Baptist Church (De Araujo J, 2006 pers. comm., 11 April).

Mr de Araujo was assisted by a Portuguese-speaking lecturer at the Baptist Theological College of Cape Town, Dr Harrison-Pike. For a number of years the congregation met in the church hall of the Bellville Baptist congregation. The work was considered as an extension of Bellville Baptist Church and the goal was for the Portuguese work to become an autonomous congregation in its own right. Later, the congregation relocated to a house in Goodwood (Hudson-Reed 1983:301) to be closer to where most of the Portuguese community.

Initially, this church consisted of Portuguese-speaking people of European origin, but with the influx of black refugees from Angola and Mozambique to SA in the mid 1990s, the congregation began to reach out to these new Portuguese-speaking residents of Cape Town.

In 2007 the pastor of the church was Rev Anselmo Vilanculo. Pastor Vilanculo came to SA from Mozambique in the early 1990s. Shortly after arriving in Cape Town he enrolled at the Baptist Theological College in Cape Town. In 2000, the Brazilian missionary pastor of First Portuguese Baptist Church, Rev Mendez, retired due to ill health. The congregation issued a call to Mr Vilanculo who had graduated from the Baptist College, to become the pastor of the Baptist Church in Goodwood. Recognising the transient nature of so many of the people in the congregation, Rev Vilanculo set out to establish a Portuguese language Bible College to equip Portuguese speaking Christians to teach the Bible to others. This college was run in partnership with the Igreja Portuguesa do Cabo (Vilanculo A, 2006 pers. comm., 17 May).

In evaluating this particular model of ministry to refugees, it must be stated that the two Portuguese language congregations have been effective in reaching a particular sector of the refugee population of SA, namely refugees from Angola and Mozambique. These congregations have provided a haven for people displaced by war in Angola. The churches have been effective in preaching the Gospel and in providing the converts with discipleship training. Yet, to a large extent these congregations and the refugees who are part of them remain largely isolated from the rest of South African society. The churches themselves have done relatively little to meet the need for integration into South African society.

3.2.6.2 *Two congregations using the same premises*

A second model of ministry consists of establishing a separate congregation for refugees on the same premises as the original congregation. The two congregations have separate structures and the refugee congregation may or may not have some representation on the leadership of the mother church. The refugee congregation is viewed as a 'daughter' congregation and the goal is for the refugee congregation to reach a point where it can become independent from the 'mother' congregation. Alternately where a group of refugees has no place to worship, they may approach a local church and request to use their facilities for worship purposes.

Cape Town Baptist Church is situated in the heart of the city of Cape Town and has been reaching out to refugees for over 10 years (Le Roux P, 2003 pers. comm., 9 Oct.). The ministry to refugees has ebbed and flowed during this period. Initially, this ministry to refugees centred on an English language school that operated from the church premises. This language school was run by one of the leaders in the field of Teaching English to Foreign Language Speakers (TEFL). This individual was a lecturer at the University of Cape Town and when her contract with the University expired and she returned to the USA, the language school closed (Le Roux P, 2003 pers. comm., 9 Oct.).

The refugee ministry at the Cape Town Baptist Church caters for two language groups, namely French-speaking and Portuguese-speaking refugees. From 2000 to 2003, the ministry to French-speaking refugees was led by a student at the Cape Town Baptist Seminary, Mr Pieter le Roux, the son of a South African Baptist missionary working in France. Pieter le Roux had been born in France and was attached to the Cape Town Baptist Church for the duration of his studies. At the end of 2003 he received a call from an Evangelical church in France and left SA (Le Roux P, 2003 pers. comm., 9 Oct.).

By 2006 the ministry to Portuguese-speaking refugees at Cape Town Baptist Church had waned and there were only about eight people attending a Portuguese language Bible Study each week in the church complex (Ndomway F, 2007 pers. comm., 21 Feb.).

The ministry to French-speaking refugees is currently led by an Operation Mobilisation missionary, Rev Florent Ndomway. He is a Congolese national, who was seconded to the Cape Town Baptist Church. His role is to lead the ministry to French-speaking people living in city centre of Cape Town. Bowl area. By 2007, over an hundred refugees from countries in West Africa, mainly from the DRC, were meeting for worship in the church hall each Sunday at the same time as the English service. While Rev Ndomway desires to integrate the two congregations, the leadership of the Cape Town Baptist Church is reluctant to admit French-speaking refugees into the membership of the church as they wish to keep the identities of both congregations separate (Ndomway F, 2007 pers. comm., 21 Feb.).

Masiphumelele Baptist Fellowship meets in Masiphumelele, a township and informal settlement near Fishhoek in the Western Cape. The Baptist Fellowship in Masiphumelele was established by Rev Phillip Moksen, an associate pastor of the King of Kings Baptist Centre in Fishhoek. The congregation of Masiphumelele consists of Xhosa-speaking South Africans, most of whom have migrated to Cape Town from the Eastern Cape. In recent years, this informal settlement has also become home to refugees and asylum seekers largely from Malawi, Somalia, and Zimbabwe.

In 2006, a group of Chewa-speaking Malawians with Baptist connections approached Rev Moksen requesting to use the church facilities in Masiphumelele (Moksen P, 2006 pers. comm., 16 Feb.). At present they use the church building at a different time to the Xhosa congregation. There has been some integration, with some of the Malawians joining the main congregation in the Bible study and prayer meetings (Moksen P, 2006 pers. comm., 16 Feb.).

In evaluating this model of ministry to refugees, it is important to recognise that these churches have taken into account the fact that there are refugees living and working in the sphere of influence of the church. The danger of this model lies in the lack of intentional attempts towards integrating the refugees into the congregation as a whole. There remains an 'us and them' approach, which unless it is addressed, could result in deepening divisions between the two congregations that utilise the premises.

3.2.6.3 *Integrated congregations.*

In this model the church leadership and congregation follow a policy of integration when it comes to ministry to refugees. Where there are only a handful of refugees attending a local South African church, matters such as integration or establishing a separate congregation for refugees may not arise. Where the percentage of refugees increases to the point where they become a significant factor in the life of the church, then such questions become important.

There are a number of factors that may influence a local congregation's decision to work towards integration or to establish a separate congregation. The most obvious factor is language. A large percentage of refugees living in the Western Cape speak either Portuguese or French. Most Baptist congregations in the WPBA consist of English-, Afrikaans- or Xhosa-speakers. To establish a congregation that is multilingual brings with it practical problems of communication.

Another factor that would militate against establishing multi-cultural and multi-lingual congregations is the Church Growth Principle of Homogeneous Church Growth, or Homogeneous Unit Principle. This principle of church growth indicates that new churches grow best when they are planted in a homogeneous community and established congregations will grow best if the congregation seeks to reach out to people that are as similar as the existing congregation as possible (McGavran 1980:225).

While this principle of churches growing best if they consist of one homogeneous people unit may work well in practice, it has met with much criticism, largely because this principle is not found in Scripture (Schenk 1973:21, 22) and in fact runs counter to the teaching of Scripture.

The main criticism of the homogenous unit principle is that it denies the reconciling nature of the gospel and the church. It weakens the demands of Christian discipleship and it leaves the church vulnerable to partiality in ethnic or social conflict. It has been said that 'the homogenous unit principle is fine in practice, but not in theory' (Chester 2006:2).

Before the fall of man into sin, there was complete unity and harmony on earth. Once sin entered the world this unity quickly unravelled. This is exemplified in the account of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). Under the dominion of sin nations and people are separated, but in Christ, the unity is restored. In Christ both the unity lost in the fall and Babel are regained (Barro 2003:2). While the church remains in this sinful world there will always be a struggle to maintain unity. This struggle is particularly acute in a multi-cultural context.

Developing congregations that reflect only one group of people, particularly in cosmopolitan cities, could be viewed as a capitulation of the church to the results of the fall and a denial of Christ's work to make one united bride. The goal that is set before the church is one of perfect unity and while this goal will only be fully realised when the Lord returns, it is something towards which the church must strive.

Another factor that makes a policy of integration difficult to implement, is the history of separation and racism in the country. While we have had universal adult suffrage for over a decade and there is no statutory prejudice or separation of groups in SA, such prejudice and separation remains a reality in our society. There is suspicion of migrants from other parts of Africa and attempts to integrate people from Central, West and East Africa with the rest of South African society may seem doomed to failure. In a nationally-representative survey of South Africans conducted in 1998 by researchers of SAMP, the survey reached the conclusion that there was “a pervasive suspicion of immigration and immigrants irrespective of the respondent’s race, income, age and education” (Crush and Mattes 1998:4).

In the face of such barriers to integration, there are congregations that are working according to principles of integration and multi-cultural inclusion. The following section outlines the practical outworking of a policy of integration in a local Baptist congregation.

Bellville Baptist Church situated in the neighbourhood of Boston in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town has been a multi-cultural congregation since 1998. The congregation is made up of people from a wide spectrum of cultures in SA, as well as nearly thirty other nationalities. The eldership consists of men from SA, Nigeria, Portugal, India, Kenya, and Ivory Coast. This diversity not only holds within it dangers of division, but also great potential to reflect the congregation of heaven as it is described in Revelation 7:9, “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (NIV¹⁴).

The congregation has also gradually developed a ministry to refugees since 1998. In that year, two young men from the Ivory Coast joined the congregation. When they first arrived at the church they struggled to communicate because they could speak no English. They learned English quickly and the church leaders soon realised that these young refugees were eager to study the Bible.

¹⁴ All Bible quotations in this dissertation are taken from the NIV unless otherwise indicated.

In 1999 they were enrolled in the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) programme of the Cape Town Baptist Seminary under the tuition of the pastor of the Bellville church (Okehi L, 2006 pers. comm., 19 July). Mr Louis Asande and Mr Leandre Okehi were diligent students and within a few years they graduated from the TEE programme with the Christian Workers' Certificate (Okehi L, 2006 pers. comm., 19 July).

In the next few years, there was a small influx of asylum seekers into the congregation. In 2000 a refugee couple from the DRC began attending the church (Pidipidi R, 2006 pers. comm., 22 July). Mr Ruphin Pidipidi and his wife Evelyn quickly endeared themselves to the rest of the congregation. Mr Pidipidi had trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood in Congo. He held an honours degree in Philosophy and Religion and had been the principal of a school for blind children before he met Evelyn and left the priesthood. Mr Pidipidi spent many hours with the researcher discussing the Word of God and he was baptised as a believer. He and his wife were subsequently accepted as members of the Bellville Baptist Church and in 2007 he was elected to serve as a deacon (Bellville Baptist 2007).

The number of French-speaking refugees grew steadily as word spread in the Bellville area that there was a congregation that extended a welcome to refugees. Church visitation teams sought to include refugees in their evangelistic visitation in the Bellville area. With the growing numbers of French-speaking people in the congregation, some initial steps were taken to include them in the worship services. For example, the sermons were translated into French and French scripts were distributed to French-speaking people during the service.

In 2001, the elders of the church recognised that Mr Leandre Okehi had the potential to become a pastor. In 2002, with the full backing of the congregation, he enrolled as a full-time student at the Cape Town Baptist Seminary. The church supported him financially, covering the costs of his studies and living expenses for the four years he was at the Seminary (Bellville Baptist 2001). Mr Okehi graduated in November 2005 and in February 2006 the Church extended

the call for him to serve as the International Pastor with oversight of the refugee ministry of the church (Bellville Baptist 2006a).

The goal of the church in its ministry to refugees has always been towards integration. For a number of years the elders resisted the idea of holding separate services in French (Bellville Baptist Elders Meeting March 2004). Eventually, Pastor Okehi persuaded the elders that such services were a necessity if the church was to be effective in reaching out to the French speaking refugees in the area. French services commenced in May 2006 and this has resulted in a further influx of refugees into the congregation (Bellville Baptist 2006b).

Combined French/English worship services are held once a month in the morning, on Communion Sunday. Worship is led in both English and French, with Scripture readings, prayers, singing and other items in both languages. Other significant events such as baptisms, receiving new members, dedication of infants and so on are done at the combined services (Bellville Baptist 2006b).

Refugees who become members of the Bellville Baptist Church have to go through the same membership application procedure and membership classes as anyone else. They also enjoy the same privileges and have the same responsibilities as all other members. They are eligible for leadership in the same way as other members and by 2007 the congregation had two refugees serving as deacons and one serving as an elder (Bellville Baptist 2007).

During 2004, the researcher spent some time speaking to groups of refugees and individuals about their needs. They were asked to prioritise the problems they faced in SA. The struggles they mentioned most often included: dealing with the South African Department of Home Affairs, finding employment, learning English, and finding affordable housing. These findings were in keeping with the findings of the National Refugee Baseline Survey, where the prioritized needs of the refugees and asylum seekers in Cape Town were, in order of priority: "Documentation, employment, education and housing" (Belvedere *et al* 2003:171).

The leaders of the church deliberated about how they could find ways to help refugees overcome these problems. Discussions around the possibility of accessing legal assistance to help people in sorting out their status with the Department of Home Affairs, led to a relationship with the Cape Town branch of the Legal Resources Centre that provides legal assistance to asylum seekers. We explored the possibility of job creation projects. The leaders of the church raised the possibility of acquiring a property that could be used to house refugees. We decided to seek ways of assisting refugees with learning English as it was thought that if refugees were assisted with language skills that would go a long way both towards the goal of integration as well as their goal of finding work (Bellville Baptist 2004).

The decision of the Church Executive was informed by the recommendations of the National Refugee Baseline Survey of 2003, where one recommendation to NGOs and other groups working with refugees was to provide English classes for refugees and asylum seekers.¹⁵

The elders, recognising that the work of a pastor should not include teaching English, decided to pray that God would bring to their attention people in the congregation who were gifted teachers and could be trained in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) (Bellville Baptist 2004). These prayers were answered when they were able to send one of their members, Mr Robert Vine, to the One World Language School for an intensive TEFL course. In 2005 he commenced Basic English classes once a week at the church. By 2008 there were seven voluntary teachers in the School of English. These include a retired school teacher who had taught in a secondary school in the United Kingdom, two teachers working in a local South African school, two American volunteers, a Baptist Seminary student and the original teacher, Mr Vine. At present these

¹⁵ Keeping in mind the influence of language on employment, and the fact that female applicants are more likely than male applicants to be unemployed, applicants, but particularly female applicants, should be given the opportunity to learn English. Fluency in English could also have the added benefit of enhancing applicants' ability to communicate with school and health authorities (Belvedere *et al* 2003:17).

teachers receive no remuneration for the many hours they spend in preparation and in teaching, but rather see their work as a ministry of love to God and to the refugees (Vine R, 2008 pers. comm., 8 July).

Around the same time that the English classes commenced, the church began to receive requests from refugees for computer training. One of the members of the congregation, Mrs Joan Parrish, volunteered to assist one or two refugees in computer skills at her home, using two computers that were donated to the church. In 2006 the church received a further donation of ten computers from the shipping company Safmarine. The computers were set up in the newly built church media resource centre which serves as the venue for the computer classes. Other members in the congregation maintain the computers and from time to time conduct advanced classes for students wanting to learn specific computer programs (Parrish J, 2008 pers. comm., 8 July).

In working with refugees the researcher has found that even where they have considerable training and skills, they have limited job opportunities. A large percentage of the men that we encounter are employed in the security industry and many of the women make a living from hairdressing in informal, roadside salons. It is not unusual for a qualified high school teacher or even a university lecturer from the DRC or Burundi to work as a humble car guard in Cape Town.

The church leaders are aware of the need to assist at least a few refugees to break out of these kinds of employment. They recognise that some of the people being served have a measure of entrepreneurial ability and they can be linked up with others who have creative or practical skills. Towards this end they began to explore a number of job creation projects. A number of young men have been assisted to set up a small company that does painting, tiling and minor construction work.

The church leaders see the matter of integration as an important aspect of the ministry of the church to refugees. In the past few years new home cell groups that consist of both South Africans and foreigners have been established. It is much easier to overcome the language barriers in a small group. These

integrated home cell groups have been very effective in building relationships across the barriers (Bellville Baptist Elders Meeting March 2006).

It is extremely hard to evaluate a model of ministry when the researcher is so closely connected to that ministry. While the ideals of an integrated congregation are admirable, there is the ever present problem of one cultural and language group dominating the others. The whole question of unity and diversity needs to be addressed constantly. While the church should, “transcend all national borders and act as the model for an international community” (Spencer 2004:132), as Spencer (2004:132) points out, “exactly what this entails will be debatable”.

3.2.7 Motivating Baptist churches to minister to refugees

Based upon the responses of local Baptist church leaders in the WPBA to the poll regarding ministry to refugees, it is evident that a very small percentage of Baptist congregations in the Western Cape are ministering to refugees. If such a survey were extended to include churches throughout the BUSA, there is little doubt that similar results would emerge.

While the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees coming to the country is increasing, the level of ministry to such people seems to remain static. Churches that are presently working with refugees may be refining and possibly expanding their ministry, but the researcher has observed that there is little growth in the number of congregations that are actively reaching out to refugees. In the church where the researcher serves, the introduction of a member of the pastoral team whose primary responsibility is to care for refugees, has resulted in increased types of ministry towards refugees, as well as a large increase in the number of refugees who are served by the church. But where congregations are not reaching out to the refugees living in close proximity to the members of the congregation, such churches do not seem to be motivated to consider ministry to refugees. The question I have wrestled with is

this: How can one motivate a local, autonomous Baptist congregation to reach out in ministry to the refugees around it?

A top-down approach, where the BUSA leadership instructs churches to undertake certain ministries, seldom has an impact upon Baptist churches. This is largely due to the autonomy of the local church. Even if the BUSA Executive were to agree to send out instructions to local churches to reach out to refugees, many local congregations would consider such instructions to be an infringement upon their autonomy.

At the same time, the BUSA annual Assembly is likely to produce similar results. While motions brought to the Assembly floor may be hotly debated and often result in recommendations that are then sent out to the churches of the BUSA, many of those recommendations, particularly those calling for action on the part of local churches have little impact at local church level.

The question then remains: How does one motivate individual, local Baptist churches to embark upon any form of ministry?

In virtually all the statements of belief of local Baptist churches in SA, the first item will relate to the congregation's belief in Scripture and the acceptance of the Bible as the final authority in matters of faith and conduct.

This desire to adhere to Scripture is important when seeking to understand local Baptist congregations. Thus, if one wants to motivate a Baptist congregation to embark upon any particular ministry, there must a strong appeal to Scripture. The ministry in question must have substantial scriptural support (Cook 1961:26). If attempts to get significant numbers of local Baptist churches to reach out to refugees are to succeed, then the motivation for such ministry must be drawn primarily from the Bible.

The Bible can be used in a number of ways in order to motivate congregations to minister to refugees. When a Baptist Christian or Baptist congregation is seeking guidance and direction in their relationship to refugees and ministry to

refugees and asylum seekers, the first place they should look is in the Bible. “The Bible provides us with an incredibly rich resource as we struggle to determine what should be our attitude to the stranger, and in the process determine also what kind of society we should be” (Hay 1996:18).

4. A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR MINISTRY TO REFUGEES

As Baptist churches are best motivated to develop new ministries on the basis of Scripture (Parnell 1980:14-15), in this section I seek to draw upon the Bible, both from the Old and New Testament, in developing a biblical basis for ministry to refugees. The biblical theology of ministry to refugees is specifically directed towards Baptist churches in SA.

4.1 OLD TESTAMENT MATERIAL.

This section starts with the premise that the Bible can be viewed as a book both written by refugees and written for refugees (Maruskin 2003:1). After a general introduction I will give a more detailed discussion of some of the words used in the Old Testament to describe various types of foreigners. This will be followed by examples of particular individuals, highlighting their ‘refugee status’. This section continues with an overview of the Pentateuch and some of the specific instructions to the people of Israel regarding the foreigners in Israel. I also deal with the Exile which can assist to inform us of the experience of migrants in a strange land.

From this Old Testament material, principles that can be applied to refugees in our communities and the church’s responsibility toward them will be drawn out. Emphasis will be given to specific key texts that set out specific obligations that were placed upon the Israelites concerning the foreigners in their midst.

4.1.1 The Bible, a book written by refugees, for refugees.

“You won't find the word ‘refugee’ in the Bible. But you will find refugees” (Exodus World Service 2005:1). One way to view the Old Testament Scriptures is to see it as a book written by refugees for refugees. If one examines the lives of a number of key characters in the Old Testament, it soon become apparent that they were displaced people, not living in the place where they were born.

Biblical characters like Moses, Ruth, Noah and Daniel were forced to leave their homes. Some were in exile and others were set on the move by disasters. They knew what it was like to live as outsiders (Tom Albinson cited in Lowes 2001:1).

From the time of Adam and Eve after the fall, the history of the people of God is a history of displaced people. Noah is forced to abandon his home because of the flood.

It is fundamentally in the light of Noah's Ark that we are all boat people, or at least descendents of them ... Noah's world is in many ways still our world. A world of violence and evil, of boat people or refugees, who flee it seeking freedom and safety. Most refugees today are fleeing situations like that, a world of wars and rumours of wars (Mt 24/Mk 13). Vietnam, Kampuchea, Bosnia, Kosovo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan. It is a litany of misery and mayhem repeated ad nauseum till compassion fatigue sets in.” (Preece 2002:1).

Abraham was called by God to leave his home in Ur and to become a homeless wanderer. When Abraham was seeking to buy a piece of land from the Hittites as a burial site for his wife, he referred to himself as, “an alien and a stranger” (Gen. 23:4). Joseph was displaced from his home by his brothers and sold as a slave in Egypt Gen. 37:28). As a foreigner in Egypt, Joseph worked for an Egyptian. He faced the sort of sexual exploitation that many refugees experience today and was imprisoned (de la Hunt and Moffett 2000:8). Later Joseph served as a foreigner in the court of the king of Egypt, rising to a position of influence.

The people from whom the nation of Israel claimed their heritage, namely the Patriarchs, were all strangers living in the Promised Land.

The patriarchs were strangers to whom no land belonged but who went their way trusting in God's provision and who were not disappointed. In this way, the patriarchs became a parable of living by faith (Burnside 2001:7).

After being displaced from the land of Canaan due to famine, the descendants of Jacob were refugees in Egypt for centuries before eventually becoming slaves to the Egyptians (Ex. 1:11). When God rescued His covenant people from slavery in Egypt, we read that many other people joined with them (Ex. 12:38). These could have been other similarly oppressed people who joined themselves to the Israelites as they left Egypt (Van Zyl *et al* 1979:79).

The Exodus from Egypt is a key event in the history and identity of the people of Israel. In drawing parallels between the Exile in Babylon and the Exodus from Egypt, Philip Ryken (2001:268) describes the Exodus as "*the* great act of salvation in the Old Testament". He goes on to state that, "the Israelites looked back to their exodus as *the* defining moment in their history as a nation" (Ryken 2001:268). From the perspective of the refugee identity of Israel, Burnside (2001:7) states, "The deliverance from Egypt also underscores Israel's foreign origins. The Israelites were, by definition, a nation of outlaws, fugitives and immigrants".

When the Israelites completed their sojourn in the wilderness and entered the land of Canaan, they in turn displaced certain of the inhabitants of the land. The situation in Canaan grew more complex with the breakdown of the Mycenaean and Hittite Empires around the end of the Thirteenth Century BCE (Van Zyl *et al* 1979:95). Large numbers of people formerly living around the Aegean Sea were displaced and went in search of new homes. One such group was the Philistines, who after attempting to settle in Egypt, were chased away and ended up on the coastal plain of Canaan (Bruce 1973:21). Their settlements eventually took the form of five fortified city-states: Ashdod,

Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath and Gaza. The Philistines adapted well to their new home and soon extended their control over large portions of Canaan. It was only a matter of time until the Philistines, moving in from the west and Israelites, coming in from the east would come into conflict with one another (Bruce 1973:21).

Even settled in the land of promise, the state of mind, if not status of the Israelites was meant to be that of foreign tenants living on God's land. As Leviticus 25:23 explains, "the land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants".

God identifies the people of Israel as foreigners and this refugee identity is re-enforced throughout the Pentateuch. This understanding of God's people as foreigners in the land is important in understanding the instructions to Israel regarding foreigners. "Given the insistent emphasis on their intrinsically 'alien' status, it is not entirely surprising that the Hebrew Bible commands the Israelites to love the stranger in no fewer than 36 places" (Spencer 2004:78).

Geographically, the land of Canaan is a narrow strip of land that forms the confluence of three continents: Africa, Asia and Europe. As a result, the region was an important trade route, with foreign people travelling through along the major highways that traversed the length of Israel (Van Zyl *et al* 1979:219). But this geographical local also meant that the land was a politically unstable area. The Middle East was a major marching route for the armies of the ancient super powers.¹⁶ The result of these movements of armies was to create political instability in the region.

The Middle East in Bible times had no form of border control, as we would understand it today. Control would only have happened in larger towns or cities, when a stranger entered the city gates. In the rural areas and the villages there

¹⁶ For e.g. when the Assyrians sought to reach Egypt, they had to go via the Middle East; similarly the Babylonians and the Persians. Another e.g. was when Alexander the Great took his army eastward he encountered the Persian forces in the territory we refer to as Turkey. Having defeated them, he engaged the main Persian army, led by the Persian Emperor, Darius III in the

was little or no control over the influx of strangers. A stranger could easily become part of the household of an Israelite by working for the Israelite. This not only invited movement of people to areas that were both safe and fertile, but it also opened the displaced people to abuse and exploitation by the local inhabitants (Spencer 2004:74).

The territory of Israel also had very little by way of natural defences (Spencer 2004:74). No wide rivers or high mountain ranges protected the people from invasion. Invading armies could enter the territory at will from any of a number of directions. The long, unprotected coastline made the nation vulnerable from the sea. The conflict between Egypt in the south and Assyria to the north meant that the territory of Canaan was often a battleground between these major powers, with the local inhabitants suffering as a result. Julius Nyerere(cited in Healey 2001:1) is said to have quoted the Swahili proverb: “When elephants fight, the grass gets trampled”, in a speech at the United Nations. This proverb would have been very true of the minnow nations of Canaan, as they bore the brunt of the conflict between the global powers of their day.

The people living in the Middle East were often the casualties of the struggles between the major powers of the world. Not only were the citizens of Samaria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel defeated by the Assyrians, but large numbers were removed from the land of their birth and forced into exile by their conquerors. A similar thing happened to the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem when the next major power, Babylon swept through the Middle East in conquest. A sizeable portion of the Old Testament is written from the perspective of exiles living as captives in a foreign country. Bible writers like Ezekiel were not only exiles themselves, but they were writing to their fellow countrymen who were also exiles, or facing the prospect of going into exile (Smith-Christopher 2002:76).

All this conflict and movement of people was bound to create large numbers of homeless and displaced people, all looking for some place to settle and forge a

region of Syria. Having defeated the Persians, Alexander took his troops southwards through the land of Israel in his effort to conquer Egypt (Van Zyl *et al* 1979:219).

life for themselves. It is against this backdrop of conflict and displacement of people that the instructions to the nation of Israel concerning non-Israelites in their midst, are written (Spencer 2004:74).

The people of Judah, exiled in Babylon, were not prisoners or slaves. Rather, they were given a measure of freedom to form communities and practice their own customs and religion; they nevertheless were forced migrants and would have been further forced to render some measure of service to their Babylonian overlords (Smith-Christopher 2002:65).

There is evidence in the Bible of their longing to return to the land of their birth. Psalm 137 presents the plight of the people of Judah as refugees in Babylon.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill? May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy (Ps.137:1-6).

Joan Maruskin (2003) in *The Bible as the Ultimate Immigration Handbook* relates the cries of the people of Judah in exile in Babylon to the cries of modern refugees and asylum seekers.

This remains the question for all persons who are uprooted in this century. How can they sing in a foreign land, especially one that does not welcome them and in fact seeks to expel them and treat them as less than second class citizens? (Maruskin 2003:4)

The book of Lamentations presents us with a graphic portrayal of the destruction in Judah after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.

Lamentations was written by an eyewitness of the siege and fall of Jerusalem. Its descriptions of those terrible events are fresh and vivid. They bear all the marks of firsthand experience (Ryken 2002:738).

This short book presents us (in poetic phrases) with valuable insights into the feelings of people who had been displaced from their homeland by violence and war (Smith-Christopher 2002:47).

Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace. Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, our homes to foreigners. We have become orphans and fatherless, our mothers like widows (Lam. 5:1-3).

Ryken (2002:739) brings home the importance of the book of Lamentations in the realm of understanding refugees and their experience:

The communal focus of Lamentations makes its message continually relevant for the church and the world. The book of Job helps people make sense of personal losses and tragedies. The book of Lamentations helps people make sense of national disasters like famine, warfare, and genocide.

In the poems of Lamentations we hear the cries of refugees, of people who no longer have a place they can really call home.

According to the record in 2 Kings 24:14-16, the Babylonians did not take all the people of Jerusalem and surrounds into exile. All wealthy, aristocratic, educated and trained people were taken away, while only the poorest people were allowed to stay. This has parallels in modern patterns of migration. It is often the wealthy and the educated that have the means to flee from a war-ravaged region. The poor are forced to remain, often in the midst of great devastation (Maruskin 2003:6).

Not only were the people of Israel forced to go into exile for lengthy periods, they also saw many people flee into their territory due to political and natural upheaval. With the conquest and instability of the region there must have been large numbers of people who were travelling through the Middle East in search of refuge and a better life for themselves. Thus, even during the periods when the people of Judah and Israel had relative peace, they would have had contact with refugees.

Added to this, many of the human authors of the Old Testament had at least some experience of being refugees. For example, not only was Moses brought up by a foreign family, but after he killed an Egyptian slave driver, he was forced to flee Egypt and live in Midian for a substantial period of time, before returning to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of the land.

David was forced to live on the run for a considerable portion of his life. He knew what it was to be displaced in his own country. Today he might be classified as an internally displaced person.¹⁷ It was out of these experiences of living as a displaced person that he wrote a number of the Psalms¹⁸. Here are examples of the psalmist acknowledging his need for refuge:

O LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me (Ps. 7:1).

In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me?
Flee like a bird to your mountain (Ps. 11:1).

In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me; come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge (Ps. 31:1-4).

The Hebrew word that is translated refuge in these and other Psalms in the NIV is *châsâh*. The literal meaning is to flee for protection. Figuratively, it means to place one's trust or confidence in someone, hence the word, refuge (Strong 1998: H2620).

¹⁷ "As well as giving hope to the uprooted people of the world since biblical times, the Psalms also describe the refugee experience" (Maruskin 2003:4).

¹⁸ Nearly half of the Psalms (73) are attributed in the Bible to David. The Davidic authorship of many of the Psalms is a hotly contested issue. For example, the Gunkel-Mowinkel (cf. Gunkel 1967) school tended to view the Psalms as forms of cultic expression, rather than reflecting historical or personal experiences Kidner 1973:34).

Refugees will often refer to the Psalms that they read and recited to themselves as they were fleeing and seeking a safe haven. One that is used very often is Psalm 91, which begins: “You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.” For God will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge...” (Maruskin 2003:4).

A common thread is shared by these Psalms and the poems of Lamentations. Both lament their position away from their home, but both see that their only hope is in the Lord (Ryken 2002:765).

In the prophetic books, the prophets reveal how the people of Israel and Judah failed to obey the command to care for the alien. For example, in Ezekiel we have the list of charges that are laid at the door of Judah and on the list is the oppression of the alien (22:6-7, 29). We find similar charges against Judah in the prophet Jeremiah (7:4-7, 22:3-5). We find similar condemnations in the prophesy of Zechariah (7:10) (Spencer 2004:98).

The final book of the Old Testament, Malachi, contains a severe warning from God:

So I will come near to you for judgement. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud the labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me, says the Lord Almighty (Mal. 3:5).

Here in the closing chapters of the Old Testament, the aliens are included, as is often the case, with the most vulnerable members of society (Maruskin 2003:5).

4.1.2 Israel’s refugee identity

In returning to the recurring theme of the refugee identity of Israel, we can see events like the Exodus, the Exile, and the experiences of the psalmist as reminders to the people of Israel of their refugee identity (Spencer 2004:76).

This is reflected in the number of Old Testament passages that call the people of Israel to treat the refugees among them with dignity and respect. Examples of this appeal to the refugee identity of the people of Israel include:

Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt (Ex. 22:21).

The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God (Lev. 19:34).

And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt (Deut. 10:19).

The identity of the people of Israel as strangers is summed up in part of the declaration of the Israelite worshippers in the celebration of the First Fruits. When bringing a portion of the first harvest to the Tabernacle, part of the declaration that the worshipper was to make before the altar of the Lord, included the words: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous" (Deut. 26:5).

Traditions such as these served to instill and preserve the refugee identity of the people of Israel. Burnside (2001:8) also sees what he terms the "self-identification as strangers", as being important for the survival of the people of Judah in exile. He further alludes to a very positive aspect of this refugee identity, whereby Jews and Christians who were scattered because of persecution could continue to see themselves as God's people regardless of "all attempts to make them into enemies, to exclude them and to force them to assimilate" (Burnside 2000:8). In this way, being a stranger in a strange land means belonging to God and to his kingdom.

4.1.3 Old Testament terms

Before examining specific words used in the Old Testament texts that can be used to motivate congregations in ministry to refugees, an important foundational question must be dealt with. This question relates to the exegetical issue of whether the people described in the Bible as aliens and strangers can in fact be equated to people that we would refer to as refugees or asylum seekers.

The issue of equating biblical terms with our modern categories of refugees and asylum seekers is a relatively complicated one because the categories used today were not in use at the time when the Bible was written. At the time when the Old and New Testaments were written, national boundaries existed, but they were far more fluid (Spencer 2004:74). People could move across international borders relatively easily without going through the border procedures that modern people are familiar with. Nations did not generally issue identity documents for their citizens, nor were they required to produce passports or visas on entry to another country (Spencer 2004:74).

While there were regional super-powers such as Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, there was no world body like the United Nations. Protocols and frameworks clarifying the status of displaced people are all modern constructs. The UNHCR was only established after the Second World War and the classification of people as refugees and asylum seekers goes back just over fifty years (UNHCR 2006c:1).

While there are major differences between the world of the Old Testament and the modern world¹⁹, people have been seeking refuge in other countries and among other people ever since the dawn of time. Ever since the first conflict between tribes, and one group was forced to flee because they were defeated and displaced, there have been refugees and asylum seekers. Forced migration, whether caused by military conquest or natural disasters, was just as

much a reality in the days of the Old Testament as it is today. The results of such forced migration, such as displaced peoples and people seeking refuge in countries not their own, was just the same as it is today (Spencer 2004:85).

Therefore, while the modern terms we use and the ancient terms used in the Bible may differ on the surface, the movement of people and the reasons for these movements remains largely the same to this day. People left the land of their birth and migrated to other places in search of a better life. People were forced to leave their homeland and flee to other places because of conflict and conquest, famine and natural disasters. These remain some of the major causes of forced migration to this day. While the Bible does not use terms like refugees, forced migrants and asylum seekers, because the reasons for the migration are similar, the terms that are used in the Bible can be considered as ancient equivalents to the ones we use today (Beld 2004:8).

In considering the terms used in the Bible, there is another complicating factor, namely that certain of the terms used in Scripture had a wider application than some of the more specific definitions used today (Spencer 2004:85). It is therefore vital for the Bible scholar to take the context of the Hebrew and Greek terms into account, as the words were not as specific as our modern terms are. For example, the Hebrew word *ger* or *geyr* that is found in many places of the Old Testament, originally referred to a guest, and therefore by implication came to refer to a foreigner, a stranger or an alien from another country (Strong 1998: H1616).

A second word that appears less often in the Old Testament is the word *toshav*. This refers to a temporary resident, “one who was not a native citizen, a foreigner-inhabitant or stranger” (Strong 1998: H8453).

These terms are used in Scripture to describe a wide range of foreigners and it is important to examine the context of each usage in order to determine if the reference is to what we would call a refugee. When the context of the terms are

¹⁹ Such as no global classification of people as refugees and no international protocols regarding the treatment of asylum seekers.

examined, it becomes clear that in many places in the Old Testament, these terms do in fact refer to people who have been forced to leave their place of birth and live in a foreign place. Nick Spencer (2004:88) sums up the difficulties in aligning biblical terms with modern equivalents:

Moving from our modern, if sometimes confused categories, to those used in biblical teaching is far from easy, not least because the categories themselves – *nokrim*, *zarim*, and in particular *ger* and *toshav* – cover a spectrum of positions in much the same way as ‘foreigner’, ‘immigrant’ and ‘asylum seeker’ do today.

A further complication regarding the issue is found when a foreigner is referred to in the Bible by their place of birth. For example in the book of Ruth, Naomi and her family become displaced in the land of Moab, then Naomi returns to Bethlehem with her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth. Back in the land of Israel, it is Ruth who is the foreigner and while the book of Ruth does not use any of the typical words for aliens or foreigners, she is consistently designated throughout the book as “Ruth the Moabitess” (Ruth 1:22, 2:2, 2:6, 2:21, 4:5 and 4:10).

Having attempted to come to grips with this underlying question of the meaning of ancient and modern terms and taking the context of each usage into account, this study proceeds to survey the usage of the terms used for foreigners in the Old Testament.

The terms used in the Old Testament to describe foreigners, strangers, residents and native Israelites will be dealt with in the order of their distance from the native Israelite. This distance is not physical, but rather in terms of acceptance and assimilation, “the degree of their integration” as Spencer puts it (2004:87). We start with those who were furthestmost from the people of Israel.

4.1.3.1 Nokri or Nekar

These are two adjectives derived from the same root meaning something strange (Strong 1998: H5237) and are usually translated into English as stranger. They refer to the foreigner who lives in his or her own country and has

no link to the land of Israel or the God of Israel. The word *nokri* occasionally refers to trader or mercenary soldiers, as in 2 Samuel 15:19. The word *nekar* can refer to foreign people who were in conflict with the people of Israel. For example, in Psalm 144:7 *nokri* are seen as enemies and oppressors by David (Sparks 1998: 241).

At times, in particular in the writings of the prophets, *nokri* are perceived to be idol worshipping pagans who have led the people of Israel astray. We see this in Isaiah 2:6 where the people of Jerusalem and Judah are accused of being in collusion with *nokri*. In the King James Version of the Bible (1611), the word is translated strangers, whereas in the NIV it is rendered as pagans.

These two terms are used in a negative way in the Old Testament. Such foreigners were not permitted to participate in the Passover (Ex. 12:43). The Israelites were not allowed to appoint such a foreigner as their king (Deut. 17:15). Such foreigners are also included in the list of people who were prohibited from entering the Temple (Ezek. 44:6-9)²⁰.

4.1.3.2 *Zarim or Zur*

The word comes from the root to *turn aside* (especially for lodging); hence to *be a foreigner, stranger* (Strong 1998, H2114). Negative references to *zur* and *zarim* are found in the prophetic writings (Isaiah 1:7-8, 25:2-6, Jeremiah 51:51, Ezekiel 31:12 and Hosea 7:8-13). In two places in the Old Testament this term is used interchangeably with *nekar*: Firstly in Isaiah 61:5, “Aliens (*zur*) will shepherd your flocks; foreigners (*nekar*) will work your fields and vineyards”. In Lamentations 5:2, we read, “Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens (*zur*), our homes to foreigners (*nokri*)”.

Independent foreigners, (*nokri, nekar, zur and zarim*) tended to be regarded with suspicion, hatred and fear by the Israelites. They were viewed as enemies,

²⁰ At the same time, Deuteronomy 29:22-28 indicates that Israel was also called to be a display of God's handiwork to foreign people. When foreigners (*nokri*) saw the calamities that came

oppressors and a threat to the land. God's people were warned not to mix too closely with them or enter into alliances with such foreigners (Burnside 2001:19). The main reason for this negative portrayal of such peoples was their allegiance to idols and the possibility that they might pollute Israel with their pagan worship. However, the situation is not totally negative, as Israel was called by God to be a witness to foreigners, as can be seen in 1 Kings 8:41-43:

As for the foreigner (*nokri*) who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name - for men will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm - when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner (*nokri*) asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.

4.1.3.3 *Toshav*

This term occurs fourteen times in the Old Testament. It is derived from the root *yashav*, which means to sit down (specifically as judge, in ambush or in quiet); by implication, "to dwell, to remain; to settle, continue, (cause to, make to) dwell (-ing), habitation, (make to) inhabit (-ant), remain, return, seat, set (-tle), tarry, therefore a dweller" (Strong 1998:H3427).

Toshav was therefore a term used to distinguish a foreign person who was living in the land from a native citizen. It also distinguished the resident foreigner from a temporary visitor, such as a trader. *Toshav* refers to "a resident alien, a foreigner-inhabitant, sojourner and stranger" (Strong 1998: H8453). At times it is used together with the word *ger*, as in Genesis 23:4, where Abraham describes himself as *ger-toshav* and in Psalm 39:12, where David speaks of himself as both *ger* and *toshav*. In the NIV *toshav* is usually translated stranger.

Both Burnside (2001:16) and Spencer (2004:88) find evidence in the Old Testament to draw a distinction between the terms *ger* and *toshav*. While the

upon Israel, it was meant to direct them to the God who was punishing his people (Burnside 2001:18).

two words may have been used interchangeably in certain descriptive texts, such as Genesis 23, there seems to be a distinction in the prescriptive texts. We find this particularly in the instructions in Leviticus and Numbers, where the people of Israel are instructed to treat the *ger* in the same way as the native born Israelite. This instruction is not applied to the *toshav* (Burnside 2001:16).

Spencer (2004:88) on the other hand, sees the distinction between *ger* and *toshav* lying in the degree of assimilation into the host community. Thus he sees the Hebrew word *toshav* as referring to a non-assimilating immigrant and *ger* referring to an immigrant who has aligned himself to the people and God of Israel.

4.1.3.4. *Ger or Gerim*

The word *ger* meant a guest; by implication a resident foreigner, alien, sojourner or stranger (Strong 1998: H1616). From the root *gur*, meaning to turn aside from the road (for a lodging or any other purpose), that is, “sojourn (as a guest); also to shrink, fear (as in a strange place)” (Strong 1998: H1481). It is commonly translated stranger or alien in the NIV.

Among the ancient Arab nomads, the *jar* was the refugee or lobe man who came seeking the protection of a tribe other than his own. In the same way the *ger* is essentially a foreigner who lives more or less permanently in the midst of another community, where he is accepted and enjoys certain rights (de Voux 1973:74).

Ger is probably the closest term to our understanding of a refugee. The term sojourner, as used in the King James Version, can be confusing. It implies that *gerim* were transitory residents in Israel, while the Bible indicates that unlike *nokrim* and *zarim*, *gerim* were permanent in the land, having been displaced from their homes and lived together with and even in the households of native Israelites (Spencer 2004:87).

Following the distinction drawn by Spencer, the clearest way to distinguish between *toshav* and *gerim*, is to see the level of integration into Israelite society

and the community of faith. For example, in Exodus 20:10, in the context of the fourth commandment of keeping the Sabbath, there is reference to “the alien (*ger*) within your gates” who is commanded to keep the Sabbath. The implication of this verse is that there were *gerim* living permanently with Israelite, within the confines of the household. Such people had joined themselves to a particular family and were following the customs, practices and faith of that Israelite family. In this regard, the Old Testament is consistent in calling for justice and equality to be shown to such immigrants (Spencer 2004:87).

A foundational text in the Old Testament relating to the treatment of *gerim* is found in Leviticus 19:33-34, “when an alien (*ger*) lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien (*ger*) living (*gur*) with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens (*gerim*) in Egypt. I am the LORD your God”. Here the people of Israel are called to recollect their own refugee history as the basis of their treatment of refugees who are living permanently in their midst.

The Old Testament often refers to the alien (*ger*) in the same sentence as the widow and the orphan. These were the most vulnerable groups in society and were open to abuse and thus needed protection. The Bible provides such aliens with equal access to justice, protection from abuse, oppression and economic exploitation (Ex. 20:9-11, 22:21, 23:9, Deut. 27:19). The Bible further grants *gerim* access to charity (Lev. 19:9-10, 23:22, Deut. 24:19-22), fair employment practices (Deut. 4:14-15), entry to the cities of refuge (Num. 35:15) and the opportunity to own land within Israel (Ezek. 47:21-23).

Gerim were also granted access to the worship of God in Israel. A key passage in this regard is Exodus 12. This passage, set just after the people of Israel have escaped from Egypt and the very early celebration of the Passover feast, sets out who is permitted to participate in the feast. In this passage a clear distinction is drawn between the *ger* and *nokrim*. Once again the difference seems to be based upon the level of integration into the community of faith (de Voux 1973:75).

In Exodus 12:13b we find that “no foreigner (*nokrim*) is to eat it”. Whereas verse 48 of the same chapter goes on to declare, “An alien (*ger*) living among you who wants to celebrate the Lord’s Passover must have all the males of his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land”.

Here a distinction is made between people from other nations who accept the faith of Israel and obey the requirements of the God of Israel and those who do not. It is notable that there is no reference to the country of origin or ethnicity of the *ger* in verse 48, nor are there any references to the economic or social status of the person. Rather it is personal commitment to the covenant with God, in this case circumcision, that makes it possible for the assimilating migrant to be included in God’s covenant to Israel (Spencer 2004:90, de Voux 1975:75).

We see from this that right at the formative stage of the nation of Israel, the question of how to relate to foreigners receives immediate treatment. It was a pressing issue that needed to be clarified at that point. The grounds for participation in the Passover later become the basis for the rules of assimilation into the future nation of Israel (Burnside 2001:30).

In the Old Testament we find that the assimilation of foreigners into the nation is both encouraged and welcomed under certain conditions. At the outset of the formation of the nation of Israel, regulations were set in place to control the assimilation of aliens who were part of the company of Israelites.

The criterion for inclusion here was clearly not ethnic (both *ger* and *nokri* were technically foreigners) or economic (*ger* and hired workers would usually be of roughly equal standing, which was higher than that of the slave). Instead, it was circumcision – a personal sign of commitment to the covenant with God which the *ger* was free to make if he so chose (Spencer 2004:90).

Later on, we read of a number of prominent examples of foreigners who were assimilated into Israel and played a significant role in the life of the nation (Burnside 2001:5). Perhaps the best known example is that of Ruth, a widow

from the nation of Moab, who describes herself as a foreigner (*nokrivah* - Ruth 2:10), but marries Boaz the Israelite and becomes the great grandmother of the second king of Israel.

Another example is found in the references to some senior officers in the Israelite army. Numbered among the 'mighty men' of King David are people from other nations, including Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 11:3-17), Eleazar the Ahohite (2 Sam. 23:9), Shammah the Havarite (2 Sam. 23:11), Mebunnai the HushalHITE (2 Sam. 23:27), Benaiah the Pirahanite (2 Sam. 23:30) and Zelek the Ammonite (2 Sam. 23:37). All these foreign soldiers were noted for their deep loyalty to the king of Israel and as illustrated in the case of Uriah the Hittite their association to the religious faith of Israel (de Voux 1975:219).

The Old Testament law is remarkably generous towards and supportive of the vulnerable foreigners in Israel; people who had been displaced from their own lands for various reasons and were now living in Israel. Such people did not have influence, and consequently were often deprived, in need and open to abuse. The Old Testament instructed the people of Israel to treat them with fairness and hospitality. Foreigners were protected from exploitation, in particular from exploitation that could so easily arise in a patriarchal society. Foreigners were sheltered from unjust dealing when working for Israelites, and protected from unjust dealing before the law (Rosner 2002:1).

It is also clear from the biblical material that foreigners could be included in Israelite society. Such inclusion was almost entirely dependent upon the readiness of the foreigners to incorporate themselves into Israelite faith and life. Such assimilating foreigners were allowed to partake in the major Israelite religious festivals, such as the Passover and the Day of Atonement. They also had equal right of entry to the cities of refuge and later even had the hope that they might become heirs to land. On the whole, such assimilating foreigners were to be treated in the same way as indigenous Israelites (Rosner 2002:1).

In dealing with the role of the state, Nick Spencer (2004:131), in his book *Asylum and Immigration* sees the matter of assimilation as a pivotal issue, if not

the key issue in developing a national policy towards refugees and immigrants in general. He compares the citizenship ceremonies that are practiced in countries like Australia, Canada and the United States with the lack of such processes in the United Kingdom and makes a call for an immigration policy in Great Britain that demands a willingness to accept integration on the part of the immigrant (Spencer 2004:131).

This factor of integration and assimilation also becomes an important issue when considering the way a church should go about developing a ministry towards refugees. We need to consider the questions about assimilation and integration from the perspective of foreigners joining a local South African church. While we would encourage a refugee to accept the teaching of the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ, can we expect a French speaking person from the DRC, who is a believer in Jesus Christ, to embrace South African culture before we admit them into the membership of the church?

We also need to grapple with the question of whether the issues of assimilation and integration work in reverse. In our efforts to welcome refugees into our congregations, should local South African churches expand their linguistic and cultural identity to include the foreigner? Should we include elements of worship that reflect the culture of the West African refugees in the congregation? If we look for answers in the Old Testament, in Israel, it would seem that assimilating aliens maintained a measure of their own national identity, such as their names and culture, but they accepted the spiritual identity of Israel.

Another issue relates to church membership and citizenship. Can a local Baptist congregation receive into membership a person who is not a citizen of SA? Baptist churches hold to the principle of the separation of church and state. Where government policy is at odds with gospel principles, the church should be prepared to challenge such policy. Presently the South African government places no restrictions on who can or cannot be a member of a local church. Citizenship in SA should never be criterion for admission into the membership of a local church.

Baptist churches hold to the doctrines of Regenerate Church Membership and Believers' Baptism. Therefore in principle, membership and participation in the life of the church is open to all who have confessed faith in Christ and have been baptised on confession of faith. In societies that are polarised along racial lines and where foreigners are ostracised, the local church can serve as a model of a multi-cultural community that welcomes all who have turned in faith to follow Christ and obey the Bible.

4.1.4 Overview of the refugee emphasis in the Pentateuch

4.1.4.1 Genesis

Starting with the book of Genesis, we can see the theme of displaced people as a thread that makes its way throughout Scripture. In Genesis chapter 3 we find Adam and Eve evicted from their home in the Garden of Eden as a result of the fall into sin. Adam and Eve can therefore be considered as the first refugees in the world. Sin remains the root cause for the disruption of people's lives that sends them into exile. In the next chapter we read of Cain who describes himself as "a restless wanderer on the earth" (Gen. 4:15). Once again the cause of the exile of Cain and his migrant status, as it were, was sin, namely murdering his brother.

Genesis 6 - 9 presents us with the account of Noah and the flood. Noah is also forced to leave his home and to float with his family in the ark until the water subsided. Once again, Noah and his family take refuge in the ark in order to escape the judgement of God upon the growing wickedness in the world. Once the ark came to rest on dry ground, Noah had to start afresh and establish his family in a strange place.

Genesis 11 sets out the narrative of the tower of Babel and we are told that after God confused the builders of the tower through the introduction of different languages, "from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:9). This has a bearing on the question of refugees, as Babel

and the dispersion of people into different language groups can be seen as the establishment of nations and nationalism. Stigers (1976:129) draws the conclusion from Genesis 11 that, “in general, nationalism is best for the world in its present state of sin and that to destroy those national boundaries is contrary to God’s present will”.

The story of Abraham is a story about a homeless wanderer. In Genesis 12 we read of the call of God on Abram to leave his country and his people and to go to an undisclosed destination. That is very close to the description of a refugee as a person who has been forced to leave his or her country and his people and go to a strange country. Abram lived his entire life as a refugee in the lands of strangers. He and his family experienced some of the negative experiences that vulnerable refugees experience today. Just as there were attempts to exploit Sarai sexually (Gen. 12:14-15, 20:1-2), many refugees experience similar sexual exploitation in the countries where they seek refuge (Crush, Peberdy & Williams 2006:6).

There are also direct references to the refugee status of Abraham and his family in the book of Genesis. For example, when Abraham received the covenant of circumcision in Genesis 17, we read that God repeated the promise of a land to the landless Abraham. Abraham received the promise that, “the whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you” (Gen. 17:8).

In the narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot is described as one who came to the city of Sodom as an alien (Gen. 19:9). We see in Genesis 23 that when Abraham’s wife Sarah died, Abraham had to buy some land to serve as a burial ground from the Hittites. Abraham describes himself to the Hittites in the following terms: “I am an alien and a stranger among you” (23:3).

Calvin (1965:580) views Abraham’s words as a conciliatory address, whereby he gives the Hittites the assurance that he is not out to dispossess them of their land, but rather, as a foreigner who is passing by, simply wishes to bury his dead with due dignity.

The book of Genesis closes with the descendants of Abraham no longer living in the land that God had promised to them, but rather as refugees in the land of Egypt. Having left the land of promise because of drought, the people found refuge in Egypt.

4.1.4.2. Exodus

The Book of Exodus opens with the theme of oppression and injustice towards foreigners. The people of Israel came to Egypt to find refuge from famine became the victims of an oppressive Egyptian regime (Gen. 46 & Ex. 1).

The Egyptian authorities had become pathologically nervous about this increase in the immigrant population and determined, first, on a policy of persecution and then ethnic cleansing and genocide (Motyer 2005:17).

The person God chose to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt was a man who knew what it was to flee from his place of birth because he was afraid that he would be killed. Moses, while born in Egypt, spent most of his life outside of the country of his birth (Ex. 2:23), eventually leading the Israelites to the land promised to them by God. The narrative of the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the land of Canaan is a story of homeless wanderers. Exodus presents us with a body of homeless migrants who are searching for a permanent home (Maruskin 2003:3).

4.1.4.3. Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

There is much in the instructions in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy that can serve as guidelines for individual Christians and the church community. This is particularly true in regard to the instructions in the Pentateuch concerning the aliens and strangers in our society. "Deuteronomy includes numerous statements of how God's people are to care for the alien in the land" (Maruskin 2003:4).

The Pentateuch contains an impressive and often confusing array of laws relating to different types of foreigners living in Israel. The nation of Israel needed such legislation in order to deal with the various foreign people who shared the land with them. On the one hand the Israelites needed to maintain their own national identity as well as their covenantal relationship with God. On the other hand, there was the need for compassion towards foreigners who were at risk (Rosner 2002:1). The civil commandments given to Israel concerning the way they were to relate to foreigners and refugees give Christians and churches good pointers to the way we should relate to foreigners living among us today.

The instructions regarding the treatment of aliens in the midst of Israel could be explained largely in terms of Israel's history and having significance for Israel and not the church. The New Testament however gives an indication as to the way the material of the Pentateuch can be applied to the Christian church. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul states that the experiences of the people of God under the old covenant serve as examples for the people of God under the new covenant (1 Cor. 10:6-11).

We could go further and indicate that the laws given to Israel can be understood and applied in the light of Christ and the New Covenant. While the New Covenant promised by God through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31) and ushered in by the person and death of Jesus Christ (Lk. 22:10, 1 Cor. 11:25, Heb. 9:15) is different from the old covenant, there is also a great amount of continuity between the two covenants. One of the major areas of continuity joining the two covenants is that of law. Examples of this are found in the teaching of Jesus, in particular in the Sermon on the Mount. Similarly to imply that the old covenant was an agreement made solely with one nation Israel, whereas the new covenant is for all nations does not take the many references to other nations in the Old Testament seriously (Gen. 12:3).

It is possible to take all the aspects of the law in the Pentateuch and express them in terms of Christ and the new covenant. This is especially true when they are understood in light of the way Christ and the Apostles used and applied Old

Testament case law. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Christ and his apostles affirmed the entire Old Testament. Thus its authority must extend to those under the new covenant (Spencer 2004:72).

4.1.5 The role of the exile

Just as the experience of the Exodus is often seen to have shaped the early development of Israel, the Babylonian exile can also be seen as one of the dominant themes in the development of Israel in the centuries that led up to the birth of Christ. Both of these formative events involved people living as foreigners in a strange land and both involved the saving actions of God in order to bring the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to their designated home.

The impact of the exile on the people of Judah can help in understanding the Old Testament material that relates to refugees and asylum seekers. At least two Old Testament books make the claim that they were written during the period of the exile. The book of Ezekiel claims to have been written by the prophet Ezekiel while he was a member of the Judaic community in exile in Babylon. The book of Lamentations contains the cries of people who had been left behind in the wake of the exile. The authors of both of these books give us evidence that they have experienced horrors that are similar to many modern day refugees (Smith-Christopher 2002:75):

Smith-Christopher (2002:88) in drawing comparisons between the book of Ezekiel and modern refugee studies makes the statement:

What appears to have driven Ezekiel the man to act out the horrors of conflict – the scattering of refugees in fear, the butchering of those captured and the taking of exiles – is what causes thousands of traumatized humans to relive memories that can literally drive them to despair, alcoholism, silence and suicide.

There are also close analogies between the anguished cries in the verses of the book of Lamentations and the laments of modern day refugees. In reading the book of Lamentations we encounter the anguished cries of traumatised people in much the same way as we would in listening to the stories of people who have fled the Rwandan genocide or the destruction of their homes in Zimbabwe today (Smith-Christopher 2002:104).

There are a number of well documented accounts of the traumatic experiences of modern day refugees, examples include, *A Cambodian Odyssey* by Haing Ngor (1987), *The Middle of Everywhere* by Mary Pipher (2002) and *Lost on Earth: Nomads of the New World* by Mark Fritz (1999).

The South African press has also highlighted the plight of refugees in this country by publishing the stories of people who have fled to SA and the further trauma they often encounter here. Examples include, "Cape Town – Refugee haven or hell", by S Timm, published in the *Cape Argus* on 03 June 2003, where he allows refugees to tell their stories. Another example of such reporting is "The duck in the suitcase" by C Stucky, published in the *Sunday Argus* on 27 November 2005, where she relates the stories of refugee children living in SA.

Leo Hartshorn (2006:4) of the Mennonite Mission Network in his article *Strangers in a strange land*, makes a useful contribution to the way we can utilise the biblical material on the exile to better understand and minister to refugees and asylum seekers: "The exile can serve as a metaphorical lens to help us look at issues surrounding immigrants, refugees and the church's place in the world".

Hartshorn (2006:3) uses the material of the exile to draw parallels between exploited migrant workers in the USA and the people of Judah in Babylon,

The need of immigrant peoples to survive makes them vulnerable to economic exploitation by the dominant culture. Economic exploitation was at the heart of the experience of Judah in Babylonian exile.

In ministry to refugees in SA, the biblical texts emanating from the exile can help us understand much of the forces that are at play in the lives of refugees and migrants. The resistance to integration can be seen as a survival mechanism for immigrant groups. The same can be said of the creation of an alternative society via the development of a sub-culture that maintains links with the culture that the refugee left behind. This is a feature of the immigrant communities from other parts of Africa and is illustrated in a newspaper article titled: *A Place to call Home*

Deep in downtown Joburg, caught up in the swell of suitcase and carry-bags where travellers look for luck, Ethiopians know where to find home. Lunchtime at the Bersu Fikad restaurant can be a rowdy affair. The national embrace is as strong as the aroma of the meat slow simmering in cumin and coriander. There is laughter inside huddles of conversation where people eat only with their right hand. They drink tej, the honey mead. And Amharic, wrapped up in frankincense, has never sounded more beautiful (Smith 2008:8).

The exile material in the Bible becomes an important lens through which those who seek to minister to refugees can try to understand the struggles and frustrations of foreigners living in a strange land. It also gives useful criteria that can help in evaluating the way we minister to refugees. In seeking to integrate foreigners into South African society we must take serious cognisance of the importance for refugees to preserve their own self identity.

4.1.6 Conclusions from the Old Testament material

When it comes to ministry to refugees in the South African context we are not referring to a Malaysian businessman who works in SA or a Chinese student in SA, who remains a Chinese national and intends going home. We are referring to people who for economic or security reasons have been forced to leave their homes and find refuge in a strange land – a land not their own. These are people who have come to SA seeking what they may term, ‘a better life’; people who have fled conflict zones in other parts of Africa in search of peace and an opportunity to rebuild their lives. As Janzen (1998:1) indicates, “The story of

God giving a home to a refugee people is basic to the Old Testament". Those who seek to minister to refugees from a Biblical position need to seek to apply the teaching of the Old Testament to the way they go about such ministry.

The Law of Moses gave clear instructions as to how God's covenant people must relate to such people. The Israelites were constantly commanded to love the alien (*ger*) as one of their own. It is helpful to understand the motivation that the Bible gives for these instructions to the people of Israel to love the stranger. Why must they love the alien as their own?

The constant reason given is because they themselves were once aliens and therefore they can empathise with people who are forced to live in a strange land (Ex. 22:21, 23:9, Lev. 19:33-34, Num. 12:15-16, Deut. 26:1-15).

Just as it was vital for the Israelites to remember their refugee past and their refugee identity, if we are to minister effectively to refugees in our context it is important for us to discover our own refugee identity.

In June 2006, at a conference of refugees hosted by the City of Cape Town, the Mayor of Cape Town, Helen Zille²¹ won the hearts of many of those attending by referring to her own refugee identity. She explained to the delegates that her father came to SA as a Jewish refugee fleeing the Nazis in Germany. Like so many refugees in SA today, in spite of his education and qualifications, the only job he could get was as a security guard on a gold mine. No doubt one reason why Helen Zille was happy to host a conference on the issue of refugees was because she understood her own refugee identity.

It is in keeping with the teaching of the Old Testament that those who seek to minister to refugees should remember that there was a time when they were aliens and strangers. If this is not true physically that we were displaced from our homes, we can see this spiritually. At one time we were alienated from God

²¹ The reference to Helen Zille is in her capacity as mayor of Cape Town and not as leader of a political party. While there might be other political figures in South Africa who have spoken about their refugee identity, the author has not come across such statements as yet.

and from his kingdom; now through faith in Christ we are incorporated into the kingdom of God (1 Pet. 2:9-10). At the same time, since coming to faith in Christ, we are now aliens and strangers in the world (1 Pet. 2:11). Our citizenship is in heaven and not on this earth (Phil. 3:20).

4.2 NEW TESTAMENT MATERIAL

In moving to the New Testament, we will cover the passages that refer to the refugee-like nature of the Christian in the world. We will also highlight the call to offer hospitality to strangers that occurs in the New Testament.

In seeking to understand the laws and regulations in the Pentateuch regarding aliens in Israel, from a New Testament perspective, it will help to understand the teaching of the Old Testament against the backdrop of the references to strangers in Israel at significant times in the life of Christ. For example, the magi who came to pay homage to Christ after his birth, the visit of Christ to a Samaritan village, the healing of a Roman centurion's servant and so on. The inclusion of 'strangers' within Israel both under the old covenant and in the life of Christ, looks forward to the inclusion of all nations in the redemptive purposes of God in Christ (Barclay 1976c:166).

We see in the book of Acts, the spread of the gospel beyond the borders of Israel and beyond all nationalistic lines, until we have the glorious description of God's people in heaven, described by John as: "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9).

We also see the way the apostles use the Old Testament material regarding aliens in Israel. For example, the apostle Peter addresses his readers both as "God's elect" and as "aliens and strangers in the world" (1 Pet. 1:1, 2:11).

Citing Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, Isaiah 45:5 and Psalm 105:6, 45, William Barclay (1976c:166), points out that the term God's elect, "had been a title which belonged to Israel alone", Now in Christ, "the mercy of God has gone out to the

ends of the earth, and all nations have seen the glory and experienced the grace of God” (1976c:166).

Barclay (1976c:166) continues with reference to the term Diaspora:

There is another word here which once belonged exclusively to Israel... exiled Jews were called the Diaspora. But now the real Diaspora is not the Jewish nation; it is the Christian church scattered abroad throughout the provinces of the Roman Empire and nations of the world. Once the people who had been different from others were the Jews; now the people who are different are the Christians. They are the people whose king is God, whose home is eternity, and who are exiles in the world.

Peter further urges these Diaspora believers to “live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear” (1 Pet. 1:17). He could have in mind the Israelites and the time they spent in exile in Egypt (Stibbs 1959:90).

In referring to the unity of the body of Christ, the apostle Paul addresses believers as “no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household” (Eph. 2:19). The words that are used are *xenos*, which means foreigner and *paroikos*, translated ‘alien’ in the NIV and ‘sojourner’ in the KJV (Barclay 1976a:118). These words draw on the Old Testament narratives of the Israelites as foreigners and aliens.

The Ephesians, believers from the Gentiles for the greater part, had been ‘strangers’, as it were citizens of another country, but no longer were they to be considered mere foreigners who happened to be visiting the people of another land. Nor were they to be regarded as aliens or sojourners, mere Gibeonites who dwelt in the midst of Israel without having obtained full rights of citizenship. cf. Exodus 2:22; Acts 7:6 (Hendriksen 1972:141).

Just as under the old covenant, where foreigners could be assimilated into the people of God through their faith and allegiance to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so in the new covenant, foreigners to Israel are included in the people of God through their faith and allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Just as many of the key people in the Old Testament were forced to take refuge in foreign countries for at least a portion of their lives, the same can be said of key characters in the New Testament. Matthew 2 for example, describes how Jesus and his parents fled to Egypt to escape King Herod.

The book of Acts speaks of the believers being scattered from Jerusalem as a result of persecution (Acts 8:1-4, 11:19). Many early Christians were forced to leave Jerusalem and make their homes in other parts of the world in order to escape persecution (Marshall 1980:200). Paul wrote many of his letters from the position of being a prisoner in foreign jails. John, the writer of Revelation was in exile on the island of Patmos when he received the revelation from God. These people all had one thing in common, they had to flee their homes because they were targets of persecution and therefore they were refugees (Exodus World Service 2005:1).

4.2.1 New Testament passages relating to refugees

4.2.1.1 Matthew 1:1-6

In the genealogy of Jesus, presented in Matthew's Gospel, it is noteworthy that not only does the gospel writer mention four women, but the women who are included are all foreigners. One purpose of Jewish genealogies was, as J D Hays (2003:159) puts it, "to establish racial purity". But this is not the case in Matthew; rather the women include two Canaanite women, Tamar and Rahab, Ruth from Moab and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. It becomes clear that Matthew is making a specific point right at the outset of his account of the life of Jesus. "Matthew seems to highlight the mixed nature of Jesus' lineage purposely" (Hays 2003:159).

4.2.1.2 Matthew 2:1-15

The gospel account of the birth of Jesus includes the narrative in Matthew of the escape by Joseph, Mary and Jesus into Egypt. While Jesus was born in

Bethlehem, a portion of his childhood was spent as a refugee in another country. This narrative can be interpreted to show us the Saviour identifying with people who are forced to flee the land of their birth and find refuge in a strange country. The fact that Jesus was a young child at this stage heightens the comparison between those who in their quest for power unleash violence, and the defenceless people who are forced to flee in order to save their lives. The story of Jesus as a refugee mirrors the stories of so many people today who left their country of birth in the wake of violence and bloodshed (Beld 2004:8).

The Bible also recounts Mary and Joseph's flight from Egypt because King Herod wanted to kill Jesus in infancy. It is worth remembering that some present-day refugee claimants have seen atrocities as horrific as the one Herod sanctioned in an effort to kill Jesus (Albinson cited in Lowes 2001:1).

4.2.1.3 *Matthew 25:31-40*

In the parable of the separating of the sheep and the goats, Jesus declares, 'I was a stranger'. The Greek word for stranger is *xenos*; meaning strange or foreign. Literally it means someone who is a foreigner living in a country not their own. Figuratively it can mean unexpected, surprising or novel. By implication it came to refer also to "a guest or a stranger" (Wigram 1852:281). The word xenophobia, which is a combination of *xenos*, meaning foreigner or stranger, and *phobos*, meaning fear, refers to the fear of strangers.

By referring to himself as a stranger, Jesus implies that when we care for strangers, we are, in a sense, caring for him. This is important when it comes to the motivation behind ministry to asylum seekers and refugees. While we may be motivated to minister to migrants out of compassion for them and out of a humanitarian concern for people who are suffering, the Bible gives us a motivation which goes far deeper than that. It touches the concept of the image of God in man, in particular the image of God to be seen in those who tend to be marginalised by society. In singling out strangers as those who are subjects

of Christian hospitality and identifying himself so directly with them, Jesus is pointing to his image in the refugee (Exodus World Service 2005:1).

In their love for despised foreigners, the followers of Christ reveal their love for the one who was despised and rejected by men (Is. 53:3). Our love and concern for Christians who have fled war, persecution or economic disaster in other countries and now live among us, is an indication not only that we are Christ's sheep, but it is a reflection of our love for Christ himself. In his comments on Matthew 25, Matthew Henry (1961:1337) makes the observation, "That which is here rewarded is the relieving of the poor for Christ's sake, out of love to him, and with an eye to him". We see this in 1 John 4:12: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us".

The only way to prove that we love God is to love the men whom God loves. The only way to prove that God is within our hearts is constantly to show the love of men within our lives (Barclay1976d:98).

Welcoming refugees, particularly those Jesus refers to as, "these brothers of mine" (Matt. 25:40), is therefore a basic requirement for every follower of Christ. "God views our compassionate treatment of refugees as a fundamental indicator of true Christianity" (Exodus World Service 2005:1).

4.2.1.4 *Luke 9:52, 10:30-35, 17:11-15, Acts 1:8, 8:1-14*

Contained in the writings of Luke are a number of references to Samaritans. In Luke 9:52, James and John are rebuked by Jesus for the desire to annihilate a Samaritan village that refused to offer them hospitality. Luke 10:30-35 contains a parable where the hero is a Samaritan. Luke 17:11-15 refers to the healing of ten lepers and the one who came back to thank Jesus was a Samaritan. In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells his disciples, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth". Acts chapter 8 gives a report of the witness of Philip for Christ in Samaria and the way the gospel was received by Samaritans.

The references to Samaritans in the New Testament are significant because Samaritans were considered to be the most despised of foreigners by the Jews (Spencer 2004:100). “It is not surprising, therefore, that the interpretation typical in Jesus’ day of the Torah’s command to ‘love the alien’ was that the alien excluded Samaritans” (Hayward 2004:3).

The ministry of Jesus extended beyond the nationalistic confines of the Jewish people. By including the people that were so much despised by the Jews in his ministry, Jesus demonstrates that he will ultimately bring nationalism to an end. This destruction of nationalism starts with the community of believers and it will culminate when the Lord returns (Cook D 1992:50). “Jesus’ teaching challenges all those who set up systems which isolate and demonise the outsider” (Hay 1996:1).

The xenophobic violence in the country during 2008 has revealed how deep the hatred and suspicion of foreigners runs in portions of South African society. There may have been reasons why Jews rationalised their hatred of Samaritans, those reason did not prevent Christ from going to extraordinary lengths to challenge the antagonism between Jews and Samaritans. In the same way, the Christian church, while being understanding of the legitimate concerns of poor and marginalised South Africans, who may feel threatened by foreigners, must at all times and by all means strive to counter the xenophobia that is so pervasive in our society. We must remain faithful to the example of Christ, who refused to go along with the discrimination that was prevalent in his time.

4.2.1.5 *Ephesians 2:12 and 2:19*

The Apostle Paul reminds the Ephesians of the time when Gentile believers were not joined by faith to Christ. They were “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise” (Eph 2:12). In this verse, Paul draws upon two Greek words to emphasise the state of alienation towards God that characterised the Ephesians before they came to faith in Jesus Christ. The first is *xenos*, while the second is *paroikos*, which is derived from *para*, which

means near or beside, and *oikos*, which means a dwelling or home. *Paroikos* literally means *from a home nearby* and by implication a *temporary resident, to reside in a place as a stranger* (Wigram 1852:310). “*Paroikoi* describes those who have no rights or legal status in the place where they are merely sojourners” (Stibbs 1959:107).

William Barclay (1976a:118), when he comments on Ephesians 2:19, could be describing asylum seekers and refugees in SA today,

In every Greek city there were *xenoi* and their life was not easy. One wrote home: “It is better for you to be in your own homes, whatever they may be like, than to be in a strange land.” The foreigner was always regarded with suspicion and dislike.

The implication in both verses 12 and 19 is that before we came to God in Jesus Christ, we were foreigners towards God. We were excluded from citizenship in the holy kingdom of God because of our sin.

The essence of the covenant of grace, to which the present passage refers, is the experience of the ‘friendship of Jehovah’ (Ps.25:14). Now in their unconverted state the Ephesians had been strangers to this friendship. They had been mere ‘foreigners’ from whom the rights and privileges of citizenship had been withheld (Hendriksen 1972:130).

These passages can help us as Christians to understand our spiritual refugee identity. There was a time when we were foreigners as far as God and his kingdom were concerned, but through the gospel of Jesus Christ, “all in every country who have access to God by Christ Jesus” (Hodge 1964:147), are graciously welcomed by God, not only into his kingdom, but also into his family.

There is a flip side to this refugee identity. While Christians are now children of God and citizens of the kingdom of God, we are now refugees and strangers in the sinful world. Having been accepted by God and being welcomed into his kingdom, we lose our place in the world that is under the sway of sin. “Ironically, the people of God are finally strange precisely because they have come home” (Burnside 2001:8).

4.2.1.6 Hebrews 11:13-16

The roll call of the faithful in Hebrews 11 can be viewed as a roll call of refugees. These Old Testament examples of persons who placed their faith in God were people who had no permanent home on this earth; rather they lived like “aliens and strangers on earth” (Heb. 11:13). The word alien is a translation of *parepidemos*, which is a compound of the *para* and *epidemeo*, and means to “dwell among a people”, or “to sojourn as a stranger among another people” (Wigram 1852:155). The word translated strangers is from the word *xenos* meaning foreigner or stranger (Wigram 1852:281).

The reference to the patriarchs admitting that they were “aliens and strangers on earth” (Heb. 11:13) is drawn from a number of passages in the Old Testament. The first is in Genesis 23:4, where Abraham seeks to purchase a burial place for his wife, Sarah and says to the Hittites, “I am an alien and stranger among you”. Similar statements are found in Psalm 39:12: “For I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, as all my fathers were”, Psalm 119:19: “I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me”, as well as in 1 Chronicles 29:15, where David refers to the entire nation of Israel and declares: “We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers” (Brown 1961:517).

In Hebrews 11, the faith of the saints of old is commended and these people are presented as role models of faith for Christians. In this passage we also have New Testament confirmation of the refugee identity of Israel. The refugee identity of Israel continues in the refugee identity of the church. The people of faith are to view themselves as aliens and strangers in the world (Guthrie 1983:234).

4.2.1.7 Hebrews 13:2-3 and Romans 12:13

Romans 12:13 and Hebrews 13:2 present Christians with the instruction to practice hospitality. In both instances the same Greek word is employed,

namely *philoxenia*. This is a combination of *philos*, love towards a friend and *xenos* - foreigner. Thus the word means “to be kind to strangers, to show hospitality” (Wigram 1852:426). *Philoxenia*, the love of foreigners, is the opposite of *xenophobia*, the fear or hatred of foreigners. Christians are reminded to practice love towards foreigners as opposed to fearing or hating foreigners.

While the NIV translates this in Hebrews 13:2 as “entertain strangers”, this does not mean we must provide them with amusement, but rather to show hospitality towards strangers. We do so by inviting foreigners into our services of worship, our homes and into our lives. It includes providing them with the kind of hospitality we would provide to any friend in our local congregation. Refugees, and in particular those who are fellow believers in Christ, must be afforded the same kind of hospitality we would naturally offer to our Christian friends from within our own community (CWS 2003:1).

A number of commentators refer to the historical context and the need for hospitality in the early church, explaining the dangers of staying in dirty and immoral places of public lodging and the early Christian tradition of providing travelling preachers with a place to stay (Barclay 1976b:191; Guthrie 1983:267). While this background is helpful in determining the context, we cannot limit the application of Hebrews 13:2 to a practice of the early church that was a response to a particular need that may no longer exist today. The biblical call to love strangers, *philoxenia*, is given for all generations of the church and for all cultures and countries where Christians may be found. John Brown (1961:674) brings this out in his commentary on Hebrews: “The Christian duty here enjoined is... the gratuitous and kind entertainment of Christian brethren who are strangers”. He paraphrases Hebrews 13:2:

The Apostle’s injunction then is, ‘Be ever ready, according to your ability, to receive into your houses, and entertain with kindness, such Christian strangers as, in the service of the gospel, from the force of persecution, or in the ordinary course of business, stand in need of your hospitality’ (Brown 1961:675).

Brown (1961:675) then makes the timeless application: “It is still the duty of Christians to open their houses as well as their hearts to their stranger brethren”.

Further to this, the context of Hebrews 13:3, where believers are exhorted to “remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering”, connects these instructions directly to Matthew 25, where we see the righteous being recognised by the Lord for feeding the hungry, quenching the thirst of the thirsty, inviting in the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting those in prison (Brown J 1961:676). When the two passages, Matthew 25 and Hebrews 13 are taken together, they provide a strong basis for the church to minister to strangers, which in the context of SA, must include ministry to refugees and asylum seekers.

4.2.1.8 1 Peter 1:1

The apostle Peter reminds us that we are God’s chosen people, precious and dear to Him, but he also points out that we are also strangers, *parepidemoi*, “a word which emphasises both alien nationality and temporary residence” (Stibbs 1959:72). As such, Christians are to view themselves as refugees living in a sinful world that is in rebellion against our king.

Here we see the New Testament writers once more developing the theme of the refugee identity of the followers of Christ. Just as a refugee is from a different part of the world and he or she may exhibit some customs and behaviours that are strange to the local inhabitants, so God’s elect are to live like refugees in this world.

There is much that Christians can learn from refugees. The author has seen how some of them manage to live happy lives, even when they live under conditions that many South Africans would reject. They live with very few material possessions. It is not unknown for a refugee to have only one change

of clothing. They know from necessity that they must travel light and not accumulate too many material possessions. This refugee mindset is a very refreshing and biblical way to approach life: to hold very loosely onto our possessions, knowing that this world is not our permanent home, we are merely temporary residents here.

4.2.1.9 1 Peter 1:17 and 2:11

Once again the apostle Peter calls on believers to live like refugees in this world. The word he employs in chapter 1:17 and 2:11, is *paroikia*. This is the word for the state of being stranger or a temporary resident in the land (Wigram 1852:310). Once again, this is a further development of the refugee identity of the Christian.

Once we become Christians we are to think of ourselves as only strangers and pilgrims on the earth, residing here temporarily, but not belonging, nor becoming settlers. The first word, *paroikoi*, describes those who have no legal rights or legal status in the place where they are merely sojourners (Stibbs 1959:107).

If we are truly refugees in this world, we must live with our eyes on our heavenly home. We must travel through life with our bags packed ready to go home. We must look on the material things of the world with a feeling of 'strangeness' to the ways of the world.

John Calvin (1965:211), perhaps reflecting on his own experiences as a refugee from France comments,

The faithful are strangers upon the earth ... Often constrained by necessity, they wander from place to place, but wheresoever the tempest bears them, they carry with them a sedate mind; till finally, by perpetual change of place, they so run their course, and pass through the world.

As the Old Testament believers were instructed to draw upon their refugee identity, so New Testament believers are instructed to view themselves as refugees in the world. This not only helps us to focus upon the eternal kingdom of God, but it also helps us to identify with those who are physical refugees.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT MATERIAL

If one considers the root causes of the phenomenon of refugees from the perspective of the Old Testament and trace this back to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, as well as considering that much of the displacement of people can be attributed to conflict and war, we can see that the root cause of this displacement is sin. It was sin that resulted in Adam and Eve being expelled from Eden. It was the sin of the nation of Judah that led to their captivity in Babylon (Harrison 1973:201). Thus in tackling the issue of refugees one has to take into account the universal impact of the fall and human sinfulness.

The other important consideration from the Old Testament material is the matter of assimilation and integration. In the case of migrants living in Israel, we saw that this was not so much cultural integration, but identification with the God of Israel and an alignment with his commands in the Bible. This biblical perspective on the concepts of assimilation and integration can be useful tools when it comes to evaluating the various models of ministry that churches may adopt when they seek to reach out to strangers living in their communities.

Taking into account the differences between the world in which we live and the world of the Bible, the Bible gives us essential guidelines in regard to ministry to refugees in SA in the 21st century. There are a number of similarities between the situation Israel faced in regard to foreigners in the land and the situation faced in SA today. Just as Israel experienced regular inflows of refugees, so people from other parts of Africa make their way to this country. Refugees are a fact of life in SA just as they were for ancient Israel and they bring about a

variety of responses, ranging from fear, hatred and xenophobia to concern, love, hospitality and acceptance.

Instead of taking our direction from society, we must determine our actions according to God's Word. In the face of this reality of the continued influx of migrants and asylum seekers into SA, it is important for local Christian communities, particularly those that are found in the major urban centres of the country, to develop a biblically based understanding of our relationship towards the foreigners living in our country.

There is a need for Christians to seek to address the level of xenophobia that is directed towards foreigners in SA. Unless churches enter this arena and begin to dialogue on the basis of the teaching of the Bible, in particular the directives in the Bible concerning refugees, the battle against xenophobia may well be a lost cause. If leaders and preachers in churches are armed with a biblical theology of refugees, they can go a long way to calling the Christians in society to heed the call of Scripture to love the strangers in our midst.

Caring for refugees is by no means restricted to the Christian community. Many of the NGOs and groups who speak out for refugees, do valuable advocacy work on behalf of refugees and provide assistance to refugees in SA are not Christian organisations nor do they emanate from churches. While acknowledging the good work being done by secular non-governmental organisations, the Christian community has a motivation in working with refugees that goes beyond humanitarianism. Caring for refugees is an action that is mandated in the Bible. Just as taking the gospel to people all over the world finds its motivation in Scripture, so caring for refugees is an action that finds its motivation in Scripture.

Having surveyed some of the evidence from Scripture that indicates the need to care for refugees, this dissertation will now attempt to draw together the threads in order to begin the task of developing a theology of ministry to refugees. Each point in this section is drawn from the Old and New Testament material that was covered in the previous section. Such a theology of ministry to refugees can be

used by local churches both as motivation towards starting some form of ministry to refugees and to evaluate the work that is already being done among refugees by the congregation. While this material is aimed at Baptist churches, it can be used in almost any church context.

5 *WHY BAPTIST CHURCHES SHOULD MINISTER TO REFUGEES*

Beyond the essential Christian ethic to love one's neighbour and to respond to the plight of the poor and marginalised, there are a number of compelling reasons why Christians in general and Baptists in particular should respond in ministry towards refugees. These reasons stand upon a twin foundation:

1. The biblical evidence (5.1) and
2. The nature of the gospel itself (5.2).

These reasons are closely related to the Baptist Principles outlined in section 3.1 above, in particular the principles of the direct lordship of Christ over every believer and the church, as well as the principle of the supremacy of Scripture in the local church.

Having established that foundation this study will continue by reflecting upon a number of areas in the teaching of the Bible that present us with less direct bearing on ministry to refugees, yet provide equally compelling reasons for such a ministry (5.3).

Having dealt with the biblical material pointing to ministry to refugees, this section will consider aspects of Baptist history and identity as yet further motivation for ministry to refugees (5.4).

After that, this chapter will draw together a number of principles that can form the basis for a theology of ministry to refugees (5.5). The final sub-section (5.6) seeks to provide a means to evaluate ministry that is directed towards refugees.

5.1 BAPTIST CHURCHES SHOULD MINISTER TO REFUGEES BECAUSE OF THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

All of the aspects of the theology of ministry to refugees that will be developed in this section are based upon and are dependant upon Scripture. The reason for this is that Baptist churches are best moved to ministry when the motivation can be verified from Scripture. Henry Cook (1961:17), in the opening chapter of his book, *What Baptists Stand for*, sees the “Supremacy of Scripture”, as the basis for all that Baptists stand for and do. “It is to the New Testament we must go for direction, and it is by the standards of the New Testament that we must seek to regulate our convictions and conduct” (Cook 1961:18). He (Cook 1961:26) goes on to add,

Baptists, as a people, are committed to the acceptance of the New Testament as their ultimate authority, and they are therefore somewhat chary of accepting ideas and practices until they have thoroughly examined them in the light of the New Testament teaching.

Churches that take their stand upon this principle of the Supremacy of Scripture and seek to live and minister in accordance with God’s Word, the Bible, need to take into account the volume of material in both the Old and the New Testaments that calls the people of God to care for the poor, the marginalised and the stranger (see section 4.2.1). Having demonstrated that although the word ‘refugee’ does not appear in the Bible, the concept of refugees as displaced people, who are living as foreigners in a strange land, pervades the entire Bible. From Abraham to Christ to the apostles, the God’s people regularly faced the trauma of being foreigners in strange country. And even where they were not actually living as exiles or aliens in a foreign land, they were reminded of their refugee identity (Spencer 2004:78).

Not only is the Bible filled with examples of displaced people, it is also replete with instructions to love the alien and to show hospitality to strangers. While these commands may be more numerous and specific in the Old Testament there is a definite continuation of the call to love the alien and to show hospitality to strangers in the New Testament. One of the clearest places

where the call to have mercy on strangers is found in the New Testament is Matthew 25, where the measure of the righteous on the Day of Judgement is how they treated the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and prisoners (Matt. 25:31-46).

Closely linked to the teaching of Jesus is the example of Jesus, who did not restrict his ministry to the Jews, but on a number of occasions, ministered to non Jews, in particular Samaritans²², who generally were despised by the Jews. Another place in the New Testament where Christians are instructed to show hospitality to strangers is Hebrews 13:2-3. The word that is translated hospitality, *philoxenia*, which means to love the stranger, is an indication that ministry to foreigners, particularly those who are vulnerable foreigners, like refugees and asylum seekers, is not an optional extra for the Christian church. These instructions regarding the way we are to treat strangers offer a compelling reason why Bible-believing Christians should seek to minister to the strangers who live among us, namely people who have fled their own countries and are now living as foreigners in SA.

Closely linked to the call to offer hospitality to strangers is the reminder that Christians should know what it is like to be strangers. The Bible indicates that we were once far from God and strangers to his kingdom.

The same logic applies to us as it did to Israel. According to the apostle Peter, all Christians “are strangers and aliens in the world” (1 Pet. 2:13). Christians of all people can empathise with foreign strangers. Once we were strangers to God, then having experienced his welcome, we become strangers in another sense (Rosner 2002:4).

²² In Luke 10, the hero of the parable is a Samaritan. Of the 10 lepers who were healed by Jesus (Luke 17), only one returned to thank him. The Gospel writer makes the telling comment, “and he was a Samaritan” (Luke 17:16). In John 4, Jesus has an extended dialogue with a Samaritan woman.

5.2 BAPTIST CHURCHES SHOULD MINISTER TO REFUGEES BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL

The second reason why Baptist churches should minister to refugees is to be found in the nature of the gospel. Baptist churches in SA fall into the grouping of churches that would describe themselves as evangelical. Evangelical churches place great importance on the declaration of the gospel or the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. At the heart of this gospel lies the matter of the grace of God. The gospel speaks about God's grace towards sinners. Grace has been defined as "love to the undeserving" (Stott 1986:83) and God's "free and unmerited favour" (Stott 1986:340).

Grace can be seen as love, favour and mercy shown towards those who do not deserve such kindness. Jesus taught that the recipients of God's grace ought to extend the same kind of undeserved mercy and kindness to those who do not deserve such treatment from us.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back (Luke 6:32-35).

Allen Verhey (1984:15) sees in this passage and others similar to it as presenting us with, "the great reversal of the kingdom". This 'great reversal' lies at the heart of the gospel. The call to lend money to those who cannot repay and to love our enemies may go against the grain of unregenerate society, but it is essential to the gospel of grace. Similarly, to show love and kindness to foreigners may go against the general tide of society, but is an essential component of the gospel.

In SA, as in most countries, there are strong nationalistic tendencies. The emphasis is on the needs and rights of South African citizens. Politicians in this

country and all over the world get elected on a platform of protecting the rights of their citizens. This focus on the needs and constitutional rights of the citizens of the country is important, particularly when we consider the legacy of apartheid, where the majority of South Africans were denied many such basic rights. Yet, in a climate where there is a focus on the needs and rights of the citizens of the country, it is all too easy for people to regard foreigners, especially those who are poor and vulnerable as not being deserving of kindness and mercy. Refugees are viewed as a drain on valuable resources that should be directed to citizens who are poor and struggling. It is this kind of nationalism that has driven a negative perception of refugees and fuelled xenophobia in SA. This kind of nationalism should not be found in the church. Just as the ministry of Jesus went beyond the Jewish people, so the ministry of the church that bears the name of Jesus Christ must open its arms to people who are not citizens of our country (Cook D 1992:53).

It is here that the nature of grace becomes important in motivating evangelical Christians to minister to refugees. As recipients of the grace of God, we are instructed in the gospel to show similar grace to those who do not deserve it. Thus, in Matthew 25, when Jesus is describing a scene from the final judgement, where God will separate the righteous from the unrighteous, one of the characteristics of the righteous is their treatment of the needy and the foreigners.

If Baptists in SA wish to be people who not merely proclaim, but seek to live out the gospel of God's grace, that grace must be extended to the poor, the needy, the undeserving and the foreigners in our society. During the xenophobic violence of May and June 2008, the people who were chased out of their homes, whose possessions were looted, who were assaulted and killed, were recognised by the perpetrator to be foreigners. That was why they were targeted for attack. On the Day of Judgement, the righteous will be identified, among other things, as being those who instead of driving out the foreigner, took them in and gave them food and shelter. The righteous will be recognised as those who came to the aid of foreigners when others were exploiting or ill-treating them.

The Christian warrant for a humanitarian response to refugees is grounded in God's clear intention to care for the alien in Israel, and to include the nations in his family, in the logic of the gospel and in the scope of the kingdom (Rosner 2002:4).

We cannot separate our ethics from our missionary and evangelistic endeavours. The way that we treat other people, in particular the poor, marginalised and vulnerable in society either detracts from our message or gives credibility to the message that we proclaim.

If we are to live biblically, we must move beyond simply identifying and understanding the individual moral judgements of Scripture. We have to combine them into a set of right standards which we can apply to ourselves, in our own situations. We have to construct a biblical ethic (Rivers 2004:4).

The refugees and asylum seekers living in SA present Baptist churches with an opportunity to illustrate and demonstrate what they believe and preach in the gospel. This is the good news: we have undeservedly and unexpectedly received a loving and lavish welcome from God. This message needs not only to be proclaimed, but it must also be demonstrated. We who were once strangers and foreigners towards God, but have been welcomed by God, must in turn give the same kind of welcome to strangers.

5.3 MINISTRY TO REFUGEES CAN BE DERIVED FROM REFLECTION ON THE TEACHING OF THE BIBLE

Apart from the direct calls in the Bible for the people of God to care for the strangers and refugees in our society, in particular those found in the Old Testament and in Matthew 25, it is also possible to derive a call to the local church to minister to refugees, by implication from other teachings of the New Testament.

This section will outline three areas where ministry to refugees either illustrates or exemplifies the teaching of the New Testament in certain areas, namely:

1. The ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5).
2. The image of the church triumphant as comprising people from all nations (Rev. 7:9).
3. The call for Christian contentment (1 Tim. 6:6-10, Heb. 13:5).

5.3.1 Ministry to refugees is an illustration and a practice of the ministry of reconciliation

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:16-20).

Reconciliation is a concept that is foundational to the Christian faith. As already stated, the Scriptures present us with mankind as being alienated from God because of our sin. "The NT doctrines of redemption and reconciliation are central to the whole Christian message and involve a disarming of man's natural enmity against God and of his self-centredness" (Guthrie 1981:937).

Just as Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 5:19, of God, "reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them", a ministry of reconciliation towards refugees should seek to bring strangers into the fellowship of the local church, not counting their differences against them.

Refugees have been separated by war or persecution from their country of origin. Many are separated from their families. When they come to the host country, they are foreigners and strangers, often separated from the locals by language, culture and even physical features. Ministry to refugees that seeks to integrate refugees into the host society is in some measure a ministry of reconciliation. If the refugee is a believer in Jesus Christ, then the barriers

between such a person and the local, national church need to be moved aside in order for the refugee to become integrated into that local body of believers. Many of the refugees in SA are followers of Jesus Christ. They may come from church traditions that are somewhat different from South African Baptist churches, but those are relatively small hurdles to overcome in order to reconcile a stranger to the family of God.

The expression that is used in English translations of the Bible, such as the NIV and Revised Standard Version, for a stranger living in a foreign place is the word 'alien'. Closely related to the noun alien is the verb 'to alienate' or 'to be alienated'. Both words are derived from the Latin *alius*, meaning 'other' (Soanes & Hawker: 2005).

Refugees are alienated both from their country of origin and in many cases from their host country. Caring for refugees through a ministry that integrates them into the local body of Christ is an attempt to deal with the sense of being an alien or a stranger in society. The church is the one place where a foreigner should be welcomed, even if they do not understand the language or the liturgy.

Refugees are also a constant reminder to the believers in a local church of their own reconciliation to God. In Colossians 1:21, we read: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour". Sin results in a person being alienated from God. We become strangers to God because of our sin. Just as Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden because of their sin, so our sin drives us from the presence of God. In this way, a refugee or alien is a depiction of the sinner, namely alienated from God. Sin causes people to be estranged from God and removes them from the presence of God.

In the concepts of alienation and falling short the grief and despair of sin are very apparent. We see in these terms the most dire of privations and the ominous non-presence of the deepest and best of everything that life can possibly afford. In short, we see the non-presence of the life and glory of our God (Berkouwer 1971:267).

Not only does our sin alienate us from God, cutting us off from the presence of God, but we are also considered to be enemies of God because of this sin.

If by his nature God cannot fail to have hostility towards all unholiness, it is inescapable that the alienation arising from man's sin has created a barrier which must be removed before reconciliation is possible (Guthrie 1981:491).

This hostility and alienation resulting from sin, was overcome through the death of Christ on the cross. Through faith in Christ, we are reconciled to God and are given the privileged position as children of God. "The summons to man to be reconciled to God is a challenge to put aside his hostility to God and to enter into the blessings of peace" (Guthrie 1981:492).

When a local congregation welcomes the refugee and asylum seeker into the fellowship of the church, they are illustrating the work of Christ in reconciling the believer in Christ to God. The refugee has been forced to leave his or her home and to live in a strange place. The evil actions, such as war, persecution or economic collapse that drive a person from the land of their birth, can be a metaphor for the sin that separates sinful man from the presence of God.

When asylum seekers reach the host country they are aliens in a strange land. They need somebody to reach out to them in compassion and to bring them into the family of a local congregation²³. In this way we can consider a ministry that seeks to integrate refugees into a local congregation as both illustrating the work of Christ in reconciling us to God and in practicing a ministry of reconciliation by reconciling the stranger to the body of Christ.

Paul addresses the hostility that existed between Gentiles and Jews: "Jews and Gentiles have both been reconciled to God 'in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end' (Eph. 2:16)" (Guthrie 1981:490). In SA, the level of animosity between certain sectors of South African society and

²³ Examples of this are Mr & Mrs Pidipidi. When they first came to the Bellville Church, even though they could not speak English, they were welcomed into the fellowship. When the congregation discovered that they had been robbed in the place where they were staying, members of the church opened their home to them ((Pidipidi R 2006, pers. comm., 22 July)

foreigners is comparable to the animosity between Jews and Gentiles at the time of the apostle Paul.

Where South Africans, refugees and asylum seekers are believers in Christ, they are part of the same body of Christ and just as each have been reconciled to God, so they have in Christ been reconciled to one another (2 Cor. 5:18). By integrating believing refugees into a local church we display the reconciliatory work of Christ. This task of integrating refugees into a local congregation is often resisted from both sides. On the one hand, local Christians can be resistant towards people who are different from them being part of their congregation, regardless of the fact that these people are fellow believers in Christ.

At the same time, refugees tend to seek to remain among people who are similar to them and therefore resist integration. We see this in the many 'refugee' congregations that have sprung up to cater for this desire on the part of refugees to remain among their own people (Ndomway F, 2007 pers. comm., 21 Feb.).

While these tendencies, both on the side of locals and foreigners are understandable, they can be obstacles towards meaningful ministry and dealing with the alienation that refugees experience in a foreign country. In dealing with the subject of the New Testament approach to social ethics, Guthrie (1981:938) makes the statement that God's "love is strong enough to persist even in the face of hostility (Rom. 5:8). In NT teaching, moreover, God's love is regarded as the pattern for man". While there may be opposition to integration both on the side of local South Africans and on the part of refugees, this should not deter church leaders from exemplifying the reconciliatory message of the Gospel in seeking to bring these groups of believers together in one congregation.

5.3.2 Ministry to refugees helps the local church to understand the image of the church comprising people from all nations

In Revelation 7:9 we are presented with a view of the triumphant people of God worshipping before the throne of God. They are not only a great multitude, but they comprise people “from every nation, tribe, people and language” on earth. Barclay (1959:32) comments that: “Here is the promise that indeed, the day will come when all this motley crowd of many nations and many tongues will become the one flock of the Lord Jesus Christ”.

In heaven, the people of God will no longer be segregated according to nationality, race, language or culture. There will be perfect harmony as all of God’s people are overawed by the majesty of God and the glory of their salvation. Here on earth, nationhood, language and culture can be regarded as “part of God’s purpose” (Burnside 2001:55). In heaven all those distinctions that separate people on earth, will unite us in worship before the throne of God. Until God’s people are gathered to their eternal home, they will have the distinctions of nations, peoples and languages. This diversity, which finds its culmination and ultimate purpose in glorifying God, is both ordained by God and a reflection of the glory of God’s creation (Burnside 2001:55).

God did not make merely one variety of plant or insect, he created vast numbers of different plants and creatures, each with its distinctive features. In commenting on Genesis 1:20-23 and the diversity in creation, Stigers (1976:60) states that, “one other significant fact of the fifth day pertains to the law of reproduction as represented in the word ‘variety’”. In the same way, Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 show us the diversity in the people of God, “from every tribe, language, people and nation”. At the same time all these diverse people have one glorious purpose that unites them all, namely to worship God.

Because ministry to refugees involves bringing strangers with foreign customs and often different languages into fellowship in a local congregation, this diversity creates an opportunity for the local church to reflect a measure of the glory of the great heavenly congregation. The differences between the local

Christians and those from foreign countries should not be seen as problematic; rather they can be reasons to celebrate.

The harmony in diversity that is possible when foreigners are integrated into a local congregation not only reflects the harmony of the church triumphant before the throne of God, it also reflects a measure of the glory of the Triune God. A glorious image of harmony in diversity can be seen in the Trinity itself, where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, though distinct from each other are one God (Boice 1986:113).

While people from different nationalities, languages and cultures remain sinful, such unity within diversity is both biblical and desirable for a local congregation. While such diversity - and particularly differences of language and culture - can bring with them the potential for division and conflict, this does not have to be the case. Because of the unifying work of Christ, who “has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14), true unity, based upon the person and work of Christ can be a reality in a church that consists of a wide variety of people.

One of the marks of the church is unity. This mark is inherent in the very definition of the church. The church is (1) founded on the Lord Jesus Christ, (2) called into being by the Holy Spirit and (3) made up of people of all races who thereby become one new people in the sight of God (Boice 1986:606).

The lack of harmony in the world is due to sin that not only separates us from God, but also from our fellow human beings. This conflict between human beings began directly after the fall, when Adam sought to blame Eve for the fall (Gen. 3:12) (Boice 1986:204) and when their son Cain took the life of his brother (Gen. 4:8). “Since the heart of man is inherently sinful, we should not be surprised by the conflicts that exist at all levels in society, from the home to international affairs” (Watson 1982:341).

The xenophobia that consumes some South Africans and causes them to hate and despise foreigners who seek refuge in this country is an image of the sin

that causes the unregenerate heart to despise Jesus Christ and his work of salvation on the cross. When a local congregation reaches out beyond the fear or hatred of foreigners and welcomes refugees into their midst, they emulate Jesus Christ who “is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14).

By reaching out to refugees and providing them with a haven of peace in the local church, Christians are serving as peacemakers (Matt. 5:9). When we actively seek to break down the wall of hostility between locals and foreigners, we are also illustrating the atoning work of Christ. Refugees, by the very fact that they are separated from their homeland because of the sinful actions of powerful people and groups, are a portrait of the person who is cut off from God because of their own sin. When a refugee is reconciled to a group of people in the host country we see a representation of the work of Christ.

There are many indications of the universality of the gospel in embracing people of all nations (e.g. Matt. 28:19; Acts 15:7; Rev. 5:9) and in every case the basis of acceptance is the same. The NT knows of no conditions which apply to one race and not another, and gives absolutely no sanction to any theory of racial superiority (Guthrie 1981:952)

It has already been noted that xenophobia has been dubbed the ‘new apartheid’ (Landau, *et al* 2005:8) in SA. By seeking to integrate Christians who are foreigners and refugees in SA, local churches will strike a blow against this “new apartheid”.

5.3.3 Ministry to refugees helps the local church to understand the call for Christian contentment

There are a number of places in the writings of Paul, where he calls believers to a lifestyle marked by contentment. In Philippians 4:12, Paul speaks of having “learnt the secret of being content in any and every situation”, while in 1 Timothy 6:6, he states, “godliness with contentment is great gain”. In many ways, Paul exemplified a Christian who was unencumbered by worldly goods and

concerns. He was free to do and go according to the directing of the Holy Spirit and he presents his lifestyle as an example for the followers of Christ. This call to contentment is also found in the epistle to the Hebrews, where the believers were instructed, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have” (Heb. 13:5).

Thomas Watson (1855:9) observed, “The doctrine of contentment is very superlative, and till we have learned this, we have not learned to be Christians”. He sees contentment as a command from God: “The same God, who hath bid us believe hath bid us be content” (Watson 1855:23).

In view of the reality that refugees are often forced to leave their homes in a hurry and make long and often dangerous journeys in order to find a safe place of refuge, they are unable to take very much with them. They are forced to be content with the bare necessities of life. Likewise, once in a host country like SA, refugees are often forced to do the kind of work that few nationals would choose to do. Frequently they earn minimum wages and face economic exploitation that forces them to live in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions in places that are scorned by locals. Watson (1855:72) states, “The humble man is the contented man; if his estate be low, his heart is lower than his estate, therefore be content”.

These are a few ways in which refugees illustrate the call to contented living. In their readiness to travel at short notice and by being satisfied with little more than food, clothing and basic shelter, refugees demonstrate the kind of simple living that Paul exemplified to the churches in his day (see Watson 1855:56).

The NT references to greed, the desire to get rich and “the love of money” (1 Tim.6:10, Heb. 13:5), indicate that these were temptations facing Christians in the first century (Guthrie 1983:269). If these vices were problematic then, they could be considered epidemic today. Refugees in a local congregation are a constant reminder for us to turn from greed and the desire for material possessions. Refugees in our midst help us gain the perspective that Donald Guthrie (1983:269) refers to as the “recognition that money is relative”.

Christians constantly face the temptation to become too comfortable in the world and to lose sight of the glory of the return of Jesus Christ and the eternal kingdom of God. Thomas Watson (1855:121), referring to discontented Christians who think they are better than others, makes the point that,

A believer is in the world, but not of the world; we are here in a pilgrim condition, out of our own country, therefore must not look for the respects and acclamations of the world; it is sufficient that we shall have honour in our own country.

One motivation for living a life of contentment is the promise of a glorious future in heaven. In his teaching on the dangers of being too focussed on material things, Paul reminds the Philippians that their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). The researcher has observed that most of the refugees he has encountered, long to be back in their home country. They spend a large portion of their income staying in touch with their home country and make an effort to keep up to date with news from home. Such contact with people who are never completely at home in the country in which they are living, it reminds the Christian, in the words of the second stanza of a hymn by Cecil Spring Rice(1962:642),

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago.
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know.
We may not count her armies: we may not see her King.
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering.
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace.

5.4 MINISTRY TO REFUGEES AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF BAPTIST HISTORY AND IDENTITY

In the early years of the Baptist movement, adherence to distinctive Baptist principles which were seen to be inherent in Scripture resulted in those early Baptists being out of step with the society of their day (Vedder 1969:293-294). This was even more acute among the Anabaptists, who were harassed and persecuted because of their particular Christian beliefs (see section 3.1). As a

result, Anabaptists and early Baptists were often forced to leave their homes and find refuge in countries where there was greater tolerance for their dissenting views (Renwick 1958:116).

Today, Baptists in democratic countries do not face oppression from the governments or state sponsored religions or churches because of their adherence to the principles of Baptism of Believers or the Separation of Church and State. However, this erstwhile experience of persecution and alienation from society experienced by past generations of Baptists, because of their convictions, provides an historical point of identification on the part of Baptists with refugees. Persecution because of a person's religious beliefs is grounds for receiving political asylum today and there is enough experience of alienation and persecution in the early history of Baptists for present-day Baptists to empathise with those who seek refuge in our midst.

The history of Baptists down the centuries - especially the history of those groups of Christians who suffered for their adherence to such principles such as Baptism of Believers, Regenerate Church Membership, Liberty of Conscience and the Separation of Church and state - can provide their modern day counterparts with a rich heritage that can form the basis for a Baptist refugee identity. The common thread in this identity is that of being an outsider. The opposition towards previous generations of Baptists on the part of the state and its agencies, including state church agencies, is not unlike the forces that drive people to seek refuge in SA. At the same time, once in the country, the experiences that asylum seekers have in their encounters with xenophobic locals and unsympathetic government officials raise feelings that they are outsiders in South African society as well.

A Baptist should have reason to love the foreigner and to care for the stranger, because from a Baptist heritage they can have an understanding of what it is to be a stranger seeking refuge in a foreign land.

5.5 ELEMENTS THAT FORM THE BASIS OF A THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY TO REFUGEES

Drawing on the Old and New Testament material that has been surveyed as well as the reflection on other areas of biblical teaching, there are a number of points that can be made about ministry to refugees. Taken together, these can form the basis for a theology of ministry to refugees that can be upheld and defended on the basis of Scripture.

5.5.1 Ministry to refugees and our own refugee identity

The Old Testament repeatedly presents the people of Israel as refugees. Both the nation and key founding individuals like the Patriarchs, Moses and David either declare themselves to be strangers and aliens or are presented as such in the Old Testament narratives (Burnside 2001:7-8, Spencer 2004:76).

This understanding of the Old Testament saints as refugees is continued in the New Testament, in particular in Hebrews where we read of Abraham: “he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country” (Heb. 11:9) and the rest of the patriarchs: “they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth” (Heb. 11:13). This refugee identity is taken further in Peter’s reference to the believers as aliens and strangers (Guthrie 1983:234).

In ministry to refugees and migrants it is important for those who seek to minister to ‘aliens and strangers’ to understand their own refugee identity. This process of identification with those we serve is not only in keeping with Scripture, it is also in keeping with the work of Christ, who identified fully with the human race he came to save (Phil. 2:5-8). It is here that our Baptist history intersects with the biblical material. Just as the people of Israel were called to love the alien because they knew what it was like to be aliens in Egypt (Deut. 10:19) and the New Testament believers were reminded of their alien status in the world (1 Pet. 1:17, 2:11), so modern Baptists would do well to recall their refugee roots.

5.5.2 Ministry to refugees done in obedience to the commands to love the stranger

The Old Testament is replete with instructions to the people of Israel to love the resident foreigners and to treat resident foreigners in the same way as a local Israelite is to be treated (Burnside 2001:35). We noted the difference in the words the Old Testament uses to describe foreigners. Those who were to be loved and treated on the same footing as nationals were the *gerim*, the resident foreigners, people who had fled to Israel for refuge and had no other place to live and make a livelihood. There are clear parallels in such people with the asylum seekers and refugees who have come to SA seeking refuge and a better life than they had at home.

The commands to love the foreigner are not limited to the Old Testament. They are mirrored the New Testament, in particular in Matthew 25:35-46 and Hebrews 13:2. These New Testament passages provide us with a positive link with the commands to Israel to show impartiality and love to the resident foreigner. On the basis that the New Testament reiterates the Old Testament call to love and care for the foreigner, we can accept the instructions in the Pentateuch regarding foreigners as being applicable to the church. Caring for strangers is therefore not a matter that is optional, it is something that God's people, both in the Old and New Testaments were expected to do.

5.5.3 The biblical call to love the stranger

The motivation for developing a ministry to refugees includes our own understanding of what it is to be a refugee (Burnside 2001:7). The people of Israel were commanded to love the alien because they knew what it was to be aliens in Egypt (Ex. 22:21, 23:9, Lev. 19:34, Deut. 10:19). Their own refugee heritage was meant to serve as the motivation for them to extend love and justice to the refugees living in Israel.

In the New Testament, not only do we have a refugee identity, we have further motivation for ministry to refugees which stems from our love for Christ. We express our love for Christ in our love for our fellow believers and our love for the poor and marginalised members of society. We reveal that we care for Christ in caring for strangers created in Christ's image and with whom Christ identifies. "When we take care of refugees, we care for the Lord" (Exodus World Service 2005:1).

The above statement is significant for Baptist churches as it elevates ministry to refugees beyond that of humanitarian assistance. It could be argued that the state has an obligation to care for refugees, or that there are a number of NGOs working with refugees in SA and therefore this is not the responsibility of any local church. Yet the words of Christ in Matthew 25 imply that feeding the hungry, visiting those in prison and caring for strangers (including refugees), are specific indications of what it is to be a Christian.

We find further motivation to minister to refugees as an expression of the gospel of God's grace. Just as our motivation to forgive those who sin against us is based upon the fact that we have experienced forgiveness, similarly one motivation for bringing aliens and strangers into the fellowship of the local church lies in the fact that we were once aliens from God. Having been reconciled to God through Christ, we have reason to be agents of reconciliation in the world.

5.5.4 The importance of assimilation and integration

The assimilation of resident foreigners into the people of God is illustrated in the number of foreigners who play key roles in the nation of Israel. The significance of foreigners being assimilated into Israel for the followers of Jesus Christ, can be drawn from the number of foreigners who are included in the genealogies of Christ.

The matter of assimilation and integration into the people of Israel is linked to the identification by the foreigner with the faith of God's people. This could have a bearing on the model of ministry we adopt in working with refugees and the methods used in seeking to integrate refugees into a local congregation. Clearly the role of faith in Christ is central and where a refugee or asylum seeker is a believer in Christ, they should be welcomed in the name of Christ.

If we accept that a biblical goal in ministering to refugees includes integration, this must be done in such a way that we allow people the freedom to maintain their own cultural identity and the hope of returning home. We should not force assimilating foreigners to adopt South African customs and practices. Integration in Israel was not based upon cultural or social assimilation on the part of the resident foreigner; rather it was based upon religious assimilation, where the foreigner entered a relationship of faith and obedience with the God of Israel (Spencer 2004:90).

The ramifications of such an understanding of assimilation are important. Whereas the church has every right to expect assimilating refugees to profess a common faith in Jesus Christ and to hold to a similar obedience to God's Word, the church should not force refugees to abandon their own culture or language. Rather the local church in assimilating foreigners should constantly seek to broaden its own style and practices to give freedom for refugees and foreigners to express their faith in ways that are in keeping with their own culture. Again this does not mean that a South African church allows false teaching or unbiblical practices to take root in the name of multi-cultural expression, rather in the specific areas of worship and fellowship, refugees can be given liberty to express themselves according to their own culture.

A constant danger in a multi-cultural congregation is that the host culture can dominate and suppress all other cultural expressions. This must be actively resisted in order to integrate resident foreigners as fully as possible into the local body.

5.5.5 Using the exile to understand the experiences of refugees

While the book of Job helps us to make sense of personal tragedy, books that come from the exile experience of the people of Judah, are helpful to make sense of national and communal tragedies (Ryken 2002:739). Churches ministering to refugees need to take into account that many of the refugees have experienced trauma and may have a deep sense of hopelessness regarding the situation in their home country. Books like Lamentations are not only helpful in understanding the state of mind of refugees, but they could also become a useful means of assisting refugees to express their grief and fears in ways that are biblically acceptable.

5.5.6 Christian hospitality towards strangers

The Bible instructs Christians to show hospitality to strangers (Rom. 12:13, Heb. 13:2). The Greek word that is translated hospitality in the NIV is *philoxenia*, which is the compound of *philos* – love and *xenos* – stranger. Hence the meaning of *philoxenia* is to be kind to the stranger or foreigner (Wigram 1852:426). “A hospitable person is literally a *friend of strangers*” (Hendriksen 1957:123). The starting point of biblical hospitality is the love of strangers, to “open their houses as well as their hearts to their stranger brethren” (Brown J 1961:675).

The Christian tradition of hospitality is found in many places in the New Testament (Rom. 12:13, 1 Tim. 3:2, 5:10. 1 Pet. 4:9). An attribute of an overseer in 1 Timothy 3:2, is among other things, to be hospitable. As the leader and representative of the local body of believers the overseer must take the lead in opening his home and heart to foreigners in the community (Hendriksen 1957:123). Christian leaders, in the Baptist context, pastors and elders, must both in their personal capacity and as representatives of the local church extend a loving welcome towards refugees who live in the field of ministry of that local church.

Haldane (1958:569) sheds light on the New Testament understanding of hospitality in his commentary on Romans 12:13:

This does not mean, as it is generally now applied, social intercourse and conviviality among neighbours, but it means the receiving and entertaining of strangers at a distance from their own habitations. This was a duty of peculiar necessity in the primitive times, when inns and places of entertainment were unusual. But it is a duty still; and the change of times and customs cannot set aside any of the precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hendriksen (1980:416) links the instruction of Paul in Romans 12:13 with Matthew 25:35:

What should at all times be clearly taken to heart is that whatever is done for the person in need of hospitality is done for him who on the great Judgement Day is going to say, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed *me*".

In the light of the gospel of grace; we must offer a warm welcome into our homes and hearts not only to those we know, but also to strangers; moving from fellowship with people like us to an openness to extend such fellowship to strangers. In the context of SA, in particular in the larger cities, strangers include refugees.

5.5.7 Rejecting all forms of xenophobia

This stubborn refusal to accept any forms of xenophobia is exemplified in Jesus and his relationship with Samaritans (See Luke 9:52, 10:30ff, 17:16, John 4:4ff). At the time of Christ, Samaritans were the object of Jewish xenophobia to the point that they were even excluded from their definition of the alien that was to be loved and protected (Hayward 2004:2). In the face of these xenophobic attitudes towards Samaritans, Jesus refused to participate or in any way legitimise the loathing and fear of people who were foreign to the Jews of his day.

While as believers in Christ we seek to be good citizens of SA, we recognise that the church knows no national boundaries. We cannot allow any prejudices based upon nation, race, culture or language to creep into the church. Barclay (1976a:118), in his commentary on Galatians and Ephesians, draws the conclusion from Ephesians 2:19-22 that:

Through Jesus Christ there is a place for all men in the family of God. Men may put up their barriers; churches may keep their Communion tables for their own members. God never does. It is the tragedy of the church that it is so often more exclusive than God.

Barclay's comments (1976a:118) concerning open or closed communion may be debated, but his observation on exclusiveness in the church that is based upon race or language rather than faith in Jesus Christ, is one that Baptists in SA must take seriously. Local churches dare not maintain nationalistic attitudes in terms of who may belong or who is ministered to. In Christ there is no place for national pride that issues into an attitude of superiority or even fear of foreigners.

It is in the appreciation of the gospel in the letters of Paul that we find an end to the spirit of nationalism. Yet the seeds of that destruction of nationalism are to be found in the life and teaching of Jesus (Cook D 1992:50).

As Baptists in SA, there is a need to examine our attitudes towards foreigners if we are to remain true to the teaching of the New Testament. We dare not allow a false understanding of nationalism, a spirit of self protection or any xenophobic attitudes to develop in our congregations.

5.5.8 *Living like refugees in the world*

Christians have much they can learn from migrants and refugees. They give us living illustrations of the way to fulfil the call in Scripture to live as strangers in

the world (1 Pet. 1:17, 2:11). “As long as we are in this world, there should be in our lives as Christians a certain detachment” (Stibbs 1959:107).

Refugees can teach us how to obey the command of Christ:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 6:19-21).

Refugees with their meagre possessions and their pre-occupation with their real home can help us to develop a simple lifestyle that holds loosely to material things and places high values upon that which lasts for all eternity.

The example and teaching of Jesus impresses on us a compassionate response to the refugees who reach our shores. We should know the heart of the stranger, for each one of us was once lost and estranged from God (Rosner 2002:3).

In his first general epistle, in the context of a call to godly living, Peter urges his readers to recognise that they are “aliens and strangers in the world” (1 Pet. 2:11). To both Peter and his hearers, the idea of being refugees was not strange to them.

The concept of ‘aliens and sojourners’ was a familiar one to Peter and other New Testament writers. It had been introduced early in the Old Testament where Abraham was a sojourner in the Promised Land, a land he never owned in his lifetime (Gen. 12:10; 17:8; 20:1; 21:23, 34; 23:4). So it was also with Isaac (Gen. 26:3) and his son Jacob (Gen. 28:4; 32:4). The nation Israel sojourned in Egypt (Gen. 47:7; Deut. 26:5). Even when God delivered the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage and brought them into the land of promise, they were still “sojourners” on God’s land (Lev. 25:23; 1 Chron. 29:15). The writer to the Hebrews describes all the Old Testament saints as aliens or sojourners (Deffinbaugh 2008:1).

The verses immediately following 1 Peter 2:11 indicate that the believers must have a quality about them that distinguishes them from the rest of the populace. This difference is not necessarily to be seen in outward things, such as dress or accent, but rather in the ethical quality of their lives, as John MacArthur (2008:1) comments, “Peter identified believers as foreigners (2:11-12), citizens (2:13-17), and servants (2:18-20). All believers fall into those roles. They are three arenas where the lost observe our lives”.

When people, who are literally ‘aliens and strangers’ are brought into a group of local Christians, this is a powerful reminder of the call by the apostle to live like refugees. The strangeness of the refugees, in the way they look, speak, dress, eat and even worship, is a reminder that Christians must be different from the world. The lifestyle of refugees is also a reminder of the call of the Bible to Christian contentment. Refugees are often forced to live simple, uncluttered lives. When there are refugees in a local congregation, this is a reminder to the rest of the congregation of the importance of Christian contentment.

6 *EVALUATING BAPTIST MINISTRY TO REFUGEES*

An evaluation of South African Baptist ministry to refugees could be based on three of the points mentioned in 5.5 above, namely:

5.5.4 The importance of assimilation and integration

5.5.5 The exile in understanding the experiences of refugees and

5.5.6 Christian hospitality towards strangers

These three points have been chosen because they have a bearing on the three models of ministry to refugees that were described in section 3.2.6. Using these three aspects of a biblical theology of ministry to refugees, it becomes possible to begin to pose specific questions that could be used as a means of evaluating the way that a congregation is serving refugees. The following

questions could also be used to probe a model of ministry to refugees or individual aspects of such a ministry.

1. A question that could be derived from the importance of assimilation and integration might be: What is the goal of the ministry to refugees?
2. A question that arises from the exile in understanding experiences of refugees could be framed as: Have we taken into account the trauma of the refugees to whom we are seeking to minister?
3. A question that deals with the aspect of Christian hospitality towards strangers might be: Are we practicing biblical hospitality towards strangers?

6.1 *WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THE MINISTRY TO REFUGEES?*

This question deals with the overall model of ministry that is being employed in reaching out to refugees. While a ministry that has as its goal a separate refugee church may be acceptable according to the historical precedents for church planting, it must be examined in the light of the evidence in the Old Testament of the inclusion and assimilation of foreigners into the people of Israel, as well as the nature of the church. In the examination of the Homogeneous Unit Principle advocated by early proponents of the Church Growth Movement (Refer to section 3.2.6.3 *Integrated congregations*) this principle was found to be in violation of the “reconciling nature of the gospel and the church” (Chester 2006:21).

The danger of establishing ministries and churches along lines of race, ethnicity and social standing is that they not only violate the thrust of unity that is set out as a hallmark of the church in the New Testament; but they can also be viewed as a throwback to the apartheid era, where much church planting and ministry in Baptist churches was done along racial grounds (Hudson-Reed 1983:302).

As previously indicated, xenophobia has been recognized as a form of racial discrimination and is referred to as the “new apartheid” (Landau *et al* 2005:8).

Ministry that separates refugees from other people in a church or community simply on the basis that they are foreigners is contrary to the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ. The church is, “the model of a cross-cultural community” and “should transcend all national borders and act as the model for an international community” (Spencer 2004:132).

The only practical factor that could account for the separation of refugees from other members of the church in worship or teaching is that of language. In a report to the International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland, held in 1974, the national report from the former Zaire (cited in Douglas 1975:1459), present day DRC, included the following remark that needs to be taken into account when it comes to language and ministry among refugees in this country:

The Christian world should recognize the existence in Africa of two different cultures: Anglophone and Francophone. The influence of this difference in cultures is felt in the forms and practices of the church.

To conduct worship services in French or Portuguese only becomes necessary where the church is working with refugees who speak a language different to that of the congregation seeking to minister to them. In spite of the practical difficulties posed by linguistic and cultural differences, it remains possible to maintain one, united congregation that expresses itself in more than one language. It is here that the goal of integration can be useful.

In using integration as a means of evaluating a ministry to refugees, it is important to note that integration should not mean forcing refugees to adopt the culture and social practices of the host country.²⁴ Resident foreigners need to be given the freedom to express themselves, both in worship and in social

interaction, in ways that are authentic to them. While such an approach may bring with it possible tensions over style of worship and expression, it is necessary to maintain such openness if one is going to have true unity in the midst of diversity. A biblical example of differences within local congregations and the potential tensions these can produce is to be found the Jew/Gentile debate in Acts 13 and Galatians:

The issue of table fellowship was as crucial as that of circumcision, for had the demands of this element in the Jerusalem church prevailed, then the ancient division would also have prevailed. The Gentile Christians who were not circumcised would remain as second class citizens within the church. But Paul saw that barriers had to be removed, that discrimination of any kind was a denial of the Gospel itself (Hay 1996:11).

Referring to the first twelve chapters of Genesis, Spencer (2004:109) makes the observation that, “the entire Bible story begins with an oscillation, tension and tentative resolution between unity and diversity”. This tension not only continues through the Bible, but it can also be found in modern, multi-cultural churches, where there is a genuine attempt to create space for all the different languages and cultures represented in that local body of Christ.

6.2 ARE WE TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE TRAUMA OF THE REFUGEES TO WHOM WE ARE SEEKING TO MINISTER?

Ministering to refugees entails ministry to people who in many cases have experienced highly traumatic events, both in their home countries, en route to the host country and even in the host country. This third facet of trauma can be seen in the xenophobic violence that flares up from time to time in South Africa. Refugees who were displaced by the 2008 xenophobic violence reacted with shock and a sense of hopelessness (van der Walt 2008:1).

²⁴ Burnside (2001:65) in advocating what he terms, “voluntary assimilation” of refugees in a British context, warns against, “a dominant majority seeking to forcibly assimilate a minority group against their wishes”.

Ministry to refugees needs to take into account the corporate pain that refugees may be feeling as a result of war, brutality or famine. Feelings of hopelessness can often hamper attempts to become settled in a new environment. This is particularly true of women and children.

Eighty percent of the 14.5 million refugees in the world today are women and children. These women and children have been forcibly, and cruelly, expelled from their homes and separated from their husbands and fathers. Their stories make the heart sink and the stomach turn (Hay 1996:4).

Refugees need to be encouraged to tell their stories. The use of the exile narratives and the book of Lamentations can go a long way towards showing empathy to members of a traumatised community. As mentioned earlier, a reflection on the narratives and writing emanating from the period of the Babylonian exile gives insight into the often traumatic experiences faced by refugees and offers reasons for some of their actions and reactions in the host country.

It is not only the exile narratives that speak into the lives of refugees. Large portions of the Bible, including aspects of the life of Christ are set against a background of forced migration. Mark Franken (2004:1) in *The Theology of Migration* recounts an experience he had in a camp for Rwandan refugees. The refugees, mainly women and children, were Hutus and under suspicion of being involved in the Rwandan genocide. Conditions in the camp were deplorable and Franken had no idea how he could answer the refugees' desperate pleas for help. At that point a clergyman joined the group and led the refugees in prayer, reminding them that in Christ, God hears and understands their plight. Franken (2004:1) states: "Then the Bishop said what I thought was the most comforting thing possible under the circumstances, he said, 'remember, Jesus was a refugee'".

6.3 ARE WE PRACTICING BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY TOWARDS STRANGERS?

Biblical hospitality cannot be reduced to fellowship over tea after a Sunday service or the occasional communal meal held in the church hall. If we trace the meaning of the biblical word translated hospitality, we see that there is a link between hospitality and loving the stranger. The word translated hospitality is the word, *philoxenia*, which, as previously indicated, means love of strangers. "This theme of caring for the stranger continues throughout the Bible and becomes the central theme of biblical hospitality" (Maruskin 2003:1).

1 John speaks of the practical nature of love, "let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth" (3:18). To practice hospitality and show love to refugees, is a practical exercise. It involves inviting strangers from other countries into our homes. It involves getting to know them and being caught up in their lives. It involves seeking to meet their spiritual and physical needs through a range of possible ministries. It involves advocacy on their behalf and speaking up for those who have little or no voice in South African society.

These things are costly and time consuming, but if we are to obey the Bible and the command to love the stranger, then we must be willing to pay the price of such a love. Hendriksen (1980:416), in commenting on the call to practice hospitality in Romans 12:13, states: "What the apostle is urging, therefore, is that believers will not only show hospitality when they are asked to do so, but will go out of their way to offer it".

The types of ministry and the extent of ministry to refugees may be limited by the resources of a local church, but the love extended to strangers can never be restricted by financial or manpower constraints.

As aliens and strangers in the world, God's call to us to love the alien as ourselves is challenging, sometimes difficult to work out and ultimately uncompromising. There are however, fewer higher calls to which we can respond (Spencer 204:158).

7. *CONCLUSION*

This dissertation has sought to set out the phenomenon of refugees in the context of contemporary SA. It has sought to understand the role of Baptists in relation to refugees, drawing both on Baptist Principles and Baptist history. It has further attempted to identify the roles of various Baptist agencies, such as the BUSA and the WPBA in relation to refugees in SA. Then this study looked at the various models of ministry that are currently being employed by churches that are ministering to refugees, using specific churches as case studies.

This dissertation continued to draw on the biblical material pertaining to refugees in order to develop a theology of ministry to refugees. Aspects of this theology were then used to evaluate the various models of ministry.

At the centre of this dissertation lies the biblical theology of ministry to refugees. It is hoped that when this material is disseminated to churches that have contact with refugees, it will provide them with a basis from which they can move towards ministry to refugees.

In the evaluation of the various models of ministry in section 6, it needs to be noted that these are not to be construed as criticism of the way any particular church is doing ministry. Rather such an evaluation can provide a useful tool to direct future ministry and to make necessary adjustments to the way that churches respond to both the contribution refugees can make to a church as well as the needs of refugees.

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