

# WELCOMING THE MIGRANTS: INTERNATIONAL CONCERN VS NATIONAL RESISTANCES IN THE CATHOLIC WORLD

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► **To cite this version:**

Blandine Chelini-Pont. WELCOMING THE MIGRANTS: INTERNATIONAL CONCERN VS NATIONAL RESISTANCES IN THE CATHOLIC WORLD. 2018 IRLA Meeting of Experts. Freedom of Religion or Belief in an Age of Unprecedented Human Mobility Forging New Approaches to the Conflict of Identities and Integration, Nov 2018, Cordoue, Spain. hal-02294791

**HAL Id: hal-02294791**

**<https://hal-amu.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02294791>**

Submitted on 23 Sep 2019

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# 2018 IRLA Meeting of Experts

## Freedom of Religion or Belief in an Age of Unprecedented Human Mobility

Forging New Approaches to the Conflict of Identities and Integration



## Catholic Migrant Initiatives Today

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My presentation will focus, as its title indicates, on present-day Catholic initiatives for the benefit of migrants. My interest in presenting something on this topic was at first to understand why, despite huge and longstanding institutional mobilization on behalf of migrants, despite very active international networking from specialized NGOs, this concern remains somehow very secondary in Catholic consciences and is even becoming unpopular.

### **Pope Francis' radical humanism: the migrant/ the refugee as spiritual experiment of hope and brotherhood**

I have to start with Pope Francis. For different reasons, Francis is seen as the first pope to focus his pastoral concerns on migrants. This perception is false as far as Catholic pastoral teaching is concerned, but Francis is effectively the first one to have taken such high-profile and lofty positions in favor of illegal migrants trying to enter Europe and the US. Let me remind you his public statements and highly symbolic actions in favor of migrants.

Firstly, in his Apostolic Letter of November 2013 (*Evangelii gaudium*, "the joy of the Gospel"), Pope Francis considered the fear of being demographically and culturally "swamped" by migrants as a strange and sad prejudice. He called on all countries to show "a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis". In July 2013, one of his first pastoral visits was on Lampedusa Island, where thousands of African migrants had managed to escape from their dangerous Mediterranean crossing. He denounced the European Union security policy and declared himself shocked by the European lack of compassion, of human empathy for lost lives, for the terrible fate endured by hundreds of thousands of people fleeing wars, persecution, failed states, and criminal environments...

In September 2015, Pope Francis called on the members of the US Congress to not turn their backs on their own past as descendants of immigrants, adding that he himself was an American and a descendant of immigrants.

2016 was a truly decisive year.

In February, Pope Francis visited Mexico during the US presidential campaign. The last city he went through was Ciudad Juarez, which was highly symbolic. During the mass, close to the US metal border, he called for bridges not walls to be built, just as Trump was calling illegal immigrants criminals and rapists.

In March, for the Holy Thursday ritual, he washed the feet of 11 migrants from a Roman shelter. Three of them were Muslims.

In April, he flew to Lesbos island to visit temporary asylum seeker camps transformed into de facto prisons. His intention was of course to denounce their very bad living conditions, European countries' detention policies, and so on. Pope Francis brought refugee families back to Rome on his own plane. The families were all Muslim... A scandal irrupted: how did he dare to come back with Muslim families when the Christians of the Middle East were persecuted and should be his priority?

Since then, Francis has been accused of being an immigrationist and an Islamophile and was forced to justify his actions. He explained he had not chosen between Christian or Muslim refugees. He had simply transported families who had regular papers. But he added: "they are all Children of God, and I privilege the Children of God".

Criticism against the pope in the Catholic media and among Catholic commentators exploded after the Lesbos trip and is continuing to this day, in addition to other controversial issues like his open recognition of a pedophilia issue among Catholic clergy. Pope Francis has been accused of being irresponsible and a traitor for facilitating the demographic mass replacement of Christians by Muslims in Europe and elsewhere. In France, one book written last year by a (rightist) Catholic journalist, Laurent Dandrieu, was entitled "The Church and immigration: the great malaise. The pope and the suicide of European civilization" (*Église et immigration : le grand malaise. Le pape et le suicide de la civilisation européenne*). Dandrieu wants to help Catholics to get out of this dilemma by renouncing their faith principles or consenting to their own disappearance.

How has the Catholic population of countries hosting migrants reacted? Is it ready, as part of its religious and moral duty, to welcome and help migrants in their local life? Of course, there are many local associations everywhere working, in coordination with diocesan structures, to improve migrants' lives and taking care of those who are illegally there. But the general Catholic opinion does not think that this issue is becoming the new locus of their spiritual testimony. They don't see migrants as an opportunity to exercise their brotherhood. In a recent survey in France, a country where Catholic charities are still very active and respected, only 26% of Catholics answered they were ready to give their time for or to welcome migrants and asylum seekers at home.

## **Migrants and Migrations in the Catholic Magisterium: Past and Present**

So, it seems there is a current gap between the traditional Catholic culture of compassion and the issue of migrants. And the question is why? The answer may lie in the fact that between the mid-

19th and mid-20th century migration was a big issue for the Catholic clergy. For decades, an important part of the pastoral care of the institutional Church was managing the very many Catholic migrants within the population movements of the time. When this pastoral obligation was changed into a duty of brotherhood and charity on the part of lay Catholics, the latter's concern did not really follow suit.

### ***A clerical concern***

In recent history, the immigration issue was an organizational and internal issue for the Church. Past European migrations and current global migrations were and still are from Catholic peoples. And the Catholic institution responded very strongly to maintain them as Catholic as they moved about.

During the 19th century, the Catholic magisterium found resources in the former and ancient tradition of welcoming and loving foreigners (*philoxenia*), also in its medieval tradition of hospices or houses for pilgrims run by people who spoke the pilgrims' different languages, and the crusader hospitality order, which dealt with the big exodus of Catholic population from Europe, especially the Italian one. It was a pastoral necessity and finally the second big positive issue this Church had to face, with the organization of missions.

Migrations and missions made up for the loss of influence and power the Church suffered in modern societies. So, in the middle of the 19th century, there began a massive effort to organize the departure, travels and resettlement of millions of Catholic immigrants in the Americas. This effort was led and explained by Roman instructions and texts (Apostolic Letters, Pastoral letters, *motu proprio*, decrees). There was constant Roman pressure on National Churches to welcome their future parishioners. The US Catholic Church built itself on this effort. The big move was everywhere a success, at least with the first immigration wave. The consequence of this institutional effort was the maintenance of the Catholic faith and culture, and the improvement of direct relations between Rome and the National Churches. Intercontinental fundraising societies were created, such as the Raphaelsverein or the Bonomelli Opus, and religious orders devoted to Italian, Irish, or Polish migrants were founded. In their new homeland, Catholics were protected in their culture, rituals and language and, for decades, it was a diocesan obligation to create "national parishes" as soon and as much as it was necessary. Parish and Diocesan committees in favor of migrants were instituted, with a special Office in Rome receiving different names and roles over time. In 1920, a special Day of Prayer for migrants was created which is still being celebrated.

After the First World War, European migration to the Americas decreased, partly because of the immigration restriction policies of the receiving countries but also those of countries of origin such as fascist Italy. Nevertheless, Italian migrants continued to leave and Polish and Belgian immigrants came to work in France (2 million people). Pope Benedict XV mobilized to ensure they would be able to carry on with their parish lives and his successor clashed with the fascist regime in order to keep helping Italians settle outside Italy. This interwar pope, Pius XI, constantly called on the American episcopate especially to take care of the new wave of immigrants that had started in the 1930s and was made up of Mexicans as well as further Polish, Baltic, and southern Italian nationals coming to the United States.

After the Second World War, the arrival of new Catholic migrant workers filled the demographic gap of the old European countries, helping with the reconstruction effort and then following the rhythm

of industrial growth. Between 1950 and 1970, Italy lost another 3 million inhabitants who made their way to France, the EU, Canada, Venezuela, Argentina, and Australia. Surviving European Jews but also those from the Middle East and the United States emigrated to Israel (around 1.3 million people between 1945 and 1953).

### ***Constitutio Exsul familia nazarethana (1952)***

Step by step, during the 20th century, Catholic papal teaching on migrants became more complex, depending of course on the internal history of the Catholic Church, especially the Vatican II council, and the global history of human migrations. And, step by step, migration was seen less as an internal practical logistical issue and became more of a theological one because of its global and irresistible dimension.

The first great magisterial text on the subject of migrations is the 1952 Apostolic Constitution *Exsul familia nazarethana*, which was brought in within the context of the migratory movements in Europe and the Americas just mentioned. It used the language of human rights, going over and to a certain extent establishing the organization of immigrant support. It spelled out for the first time the idea that (work) migration was a growing phenomenon of the age. The rights of human persons included the right to emigrate and to do so together with one's family. It offered both a Catholic-centered vision focused on Catholic immigrants and a wider presentation that validated a universalist vision of humans as individuals endowed with sacred rights. Here are the main ideas of the Constitution:

1. Migration is a chance to transform suffering into something good. Immigrants are looking for a good life and are ready to contribute by their skills to the prosperity of their new homeland.
2. Migrants have religious rights. They have the right to keep their religion and identity and the Church has the duty to receive them in their new environment.
3. It is time for the international organizations to work on this together through international law and discussions with the states, and by means of a just and rational distribution of migrants based on demography, resources and need for workers.

### **The 1971 *Motu proprio Pastoralis migratorum cura* and the 1978 Letter *The Church and Human Mobility***

The context of these two texts is the 1970s which saw the tail end of decolonization and economic mismanagement in many states, leading to renewed immigration. While Europe introduced its first important immigration restriction measures – the migratory flow happened just as an economic crisis was setting in –, the United States, on the contrary, experienced tremendous prosperity and an ever-growing massive flow of immigrants who came especially from Mexico given the country's proximity and severe poverty (10 million additional Mexicans). It was also the time of the first great inter-Asian migrations from poor highly-populated countries (Philippines, Indonesia, and China) to economically rich countries whose populations were in decline (Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), creating a strong illegal labor export market which led to situations of near slavery.

Since the Vatican II Council, the Catholic Church had stopped representing itself as a structure, declaring itself instead to be a people on the move. The whole of the Catholic Church should see itself as a pilgrim church, including its age-old territorial structures. The mobility of the

contemporary world turned it into a mobile church. Believers were on a metaphorical journey, whilst physically they could bring their faith to faraway places, or they could bring it at home by welcoming the world and being open towards foreigners. Local churches were called on to set up missions on their own territories.

Similarly, the North-South issue found its way into magisterial texts and the notion of development in solidarity was added onto that of preferential option for the poor as defined by the Council and used by Pope Paul VI. Migration was one of the elements of development in solidarity between poor and rich countries. The vision of migration as a form of reparation and doing justice ran through texts such as the *Populorum Progressio* encyclical which imagined a civilization built on world solidarity. In his 1971 *motu proprio*, Pope Paul VI stressed again the right to immigration and called on international actors to work together for a global integration of migrants.

Let us recap the content of the two texts:

1. Migration is a right. Human beings have the right to move. It is a natural freedom. International actors have to protect this right and think of migration as a global common issue. States have the right to limit and regulate immigration, but their limitations should not be a way to stop states from discharging their duties towards migrants, they have to avoid ghettos, deportations etc. Migrants have duties too.
2. Migration is a question of international solidarity between the North and the South. It is an element of the just distribution of resources and wealth. It contributes to building a “civilization of world solidarity”.

Non-Christian migrants shall be welcomed and accepted by Christian believers as a chance and a sign – a chance to experience concrete brotherhood, as the core of Christian faith. Foreign and non-Christian migrants have to be welcomed as human beings created by God as worthy of respect.

### ***Redemptor Hominis* encyclical (1979) / *Laborem exercens* (1981) / *Erga migrantes Caritas Christi* (2004)**

In the 1980s, the movements of illegal labor – thus deprived of legal and social protection – intensified, especially in the Persian Gulf states and South East Asia. For its part, the Catholic magisterium began to denounce the migrants’ insecure status, their difficulty in obtaining visas and having all their papers in order, the development of human trafficking, and the return to slavery. There was growing focus on those without legal papers. One point that was repeatedly made was that the human persons caught in the migratory phenomenon should be the axis around which immigrant rights were constructed and not a last consideration when deciding the immigrants’ fate and status. Pope John Paul II was therefore the first “pope of the migrants”.

Beginning with his very first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (“The redeemer of man”) of 1979, Pope John Paul II gave the Church’s action an international dimension, making the defense of human rights, several of which concerned migrants, its central goal.

1. Migrant rights: He enumerated them in his speech given to the United Nations on 2 October 1979: the right to freedom of movement and to internal and international migration, the right to nationality and residence, the right to political participation; he further included cultural rights to the core that made up a person not only at an individual but also a collective level. In 1981, JP II issued his *Laborem Exercens* which included whole passages on

the subject of work migration as a positive contribution and individual rights such as the right to emigrate together with one's family and the right to wellbeing which should include the right to respect for one's identity. An issue which would be very problematic. The cultural heritage of migrants contributed to the cultural, spiritual, and human common good of the host societies.

2. JP II stressed the discrimination that affected legal migrants and the often tragic fate that awaited illegal migrants who were not protected even though they were human beings. He demanded that the migrants' humanity be taken into account before the illegal character of their presence. In 2000, the Catholic Jubilee called for the regularization of those without legal papers in all countries as a gesture of reconciliation. In 2001, the pope wrote to the Director General of the International Organization for Migrations urging him not to be afraid of confronting and denouncing those laws that infringed international norms. He concluded his letter by writing: "beyond all differences, all men and women are brothers and sisters in the one human family".
3. He drew a parallel between the right of Catholic immigrants to be welcomed into Catholic dioceses together with their linguistic and cultural differences and that of immigrants in general to be accepted together with their culture and to contribute in some way to enriching societies. (In his last annual message for World Migration Day, 2005) Christians relied on the transcendent action of the Spirit to recognize and enhance the religious and human elements that would solidify mutual understanding.
4. With regard to Catholic migrants, each parish should become a universal church, the home of everyone, a place for authentic human and Christian promotion. The parish should be proof that catholicity is not just a concept but a tangible, cross-border, transnational, transethnic reality. The local parish became interethnic, intercultural, and inter-ritual. The 2004 instruction *Erga Migrantes* made a series of propositions to the parishes such as setting up intercultural pastoral training centers, intercultural and migration studies centers, and ethnic chaplaincies. With regard to welcoming non-Christian and especially Muslim migrants: the obligation to have interreligious structures and dialogue in dioceses. Helping Catholic associations, welcoming to Catholic schools, etc.

Thus, around the 2000s, several points seem to have been established in the Catholic pastoral magisterium:

1. Legal migrants have to be protected against discrimination. Illegal migrants need special and respectful attention because they are not protected, are often victims of trafficking, etc. They are, before all other considerations, human beings.<sup>1</sup>
2. Migrants need to be welcomed in ordinary parish life. Each parish has to transform itself into a universal Church. It will be proof that catholicity is not a concept but a concrete transnational, transethnic reality. Local parishes need also to become intercultural, with centers for migration studies.
3. It is time to welcome non-Christian migrants, especially Muslim migrants. The 2004 instruction to set up obligatory centers for interreligious welcome and dialogue in each diocese, non-discriminatory help for Catholic associations, welcoming non-Christians in Catholic schools.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_20011129\\_iom.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20011129_iom.html)

Pope Benedictus XVI summed up the migration issue in 2 points in his *Caritas in veritate* (2009):

1. The migration phenomenon has to be, at first, managed through international cooperation and between departure and arrival countries.
2. All migrants, legal or illegal, have to be seen as human beings possessing fundamental and inalienable rights to be respected by everyone and in all circumstances.

## **Catholic NGO advocacy networking for migrants**

Contemporary Catholic initiatives for the benefit of migrants which are today free of any missionary strategy and at odds with the common mood of skepticism towards migrants are the Catholic Charities and Catholic NGOs specializing in international and legal advocacy for migrants. There are two types of activism: one for international co-operation and international collective management of migrations, the other for maintaining open laws.

I can mention two great networks acting with some success at international or government levels: the International Catholic Migration Commission and Scalabrini International.

### *The International Catholic Migration Commission*

Created in the wake of WW2 to help European refugees and specializing in resettlement, the International Catholic Migration Commission was granted consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was not created for migrant rescue. And in fact, this NGO has been very successful in resettling millions of refugees since then, starting with European war refugees. Following the conflict, the efforts of Monsignor Montini and James Norris for the displaced victims of war assumed an even greater urgency with the growing exodus of refugees fleeing to the West from the Soviet bloc countries of Eastern Europe, Vietnamese boat people, etc. Today, the Resettlement Support Center for Turkey and Middle East based in Istanbul, Turkey, is one of ICMC's largest operations.

In 2008, ICMC was officially granted public juridical status by the Holy See. In 2011, ICMC was selected as the leading organization in charge of coordinating the civil society network of the Global Forum for Migration and Development, which gathers more than 700 organizations globally; it has maintained this role to date. Since last year, the focus of this Global Forum has been on its contribution to the United Nations' Global Compact for Migration. The Global Forum was constantly consulted by the UN representative in charge of the project and, after 6 months of intergovernmental negotiations, one document was accepted last July as a World Pact (or Global Compact) for safe migration. It will be signed by the General Assembly in December in Marrakech, Morocco.

### *The Scalabrini International Network*

It has another background. The Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN) is an umbrella organization established in 2005 by the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Charles or Scalabrinians, founded in 1887 to help millions of Italians migrating overseas. It encompasses more than 250 entities serving migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, seafarers, and itinerants. It advocates their dignity and rights worldwide. SIMN has established a permanent dialogue and collaboration with policy makers and civil society organizations at international, regional, and national levels, through multiple methods. These include: participating in global, regional, and national processes of migration governance; organizing conferences and seminars on migration and



related issues; supporting scientific research on migration policies; collaborating with other civil society organizations to safeguard the dignity and rights of migrants.

One of the specific activities of the advocacy work of SIMN is the International Forum on Migration and Peace, a global conference gathering every year senior policy makers from the US, Europe, and Latin America, as well as prominent influencers, Nobel Prize Laureates, senior officers of international organizations, academia, ministers and senior decision makers, representatives from United Nations' Agencies, political representatives and members of civil society organizations working on migration issues and with associations of migrants. The Forum, held since 2009, aims to stimulate a high-level dialogue and the definition of concrete actions. The 2017 Forum in Rome was aimed at influencing migration policies and practices in Europe: 1) integration of migrants and refugees in the hosting countries, and 2) the role of migrants in fostering economic development in the countries of origin.

## **Unresolved issues**

As I said before, the Catholic population of attractive countries is not completely convinced by the latest papal statements that migration (it could be different for refugees) is good for their societies and that turning towards migrants is a testimony of faith. Secondly, the Catholic Church has an obvious interest in protecting and spreading the Catholic faith. So, concretely, there are two unstoppable tendencies: to help Catholic and Christian migrants as a priority, and to help the others for missionary reasons.

-Programmatic lines are designed to protect the interests of the Catholic Church rather than promote an authentic interreligious dialogue between Catholics and non-Christian migrants. The priority is to focus on welcoming Christians of other denominations and all persecuted Christians seeking asylum. As it happens among contemporary migrants, African and American ones are all or mostly Christian (South Sudanese, Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis). The religious preference is almost "natural".

-The conversion logic is natural too. Many Catholic NGOs/ Charities are helping future or newly arrived migrants because they are susceptible to conversion. This task is not stated outright in current official Catholic texts, but it exists and is morally difficult. Even though there has been no communication on this subject, research conducted has started to raise this question. Thus, Iranians, Afghans, Iraqis, and Syrians convert on their way to Europe, or once they have arrived there, through contact with Christian NGOs who take care of them. It is a reality. These conversions have been condemned for taking advantage of vulnerable populations or denounced as a strategy to get refugee status. Indeed, several cases brought before the European Court of Human Rights or the European Court of Justice have, on the basis of conventions and their articles on the protection of asylum seekers, seen decisions against the removal of migrants because they could face death for religious reasons. Another rational motive: some convert so as not to be stigmatized as Muslims and hence as potential terrorists. Because non-Christian migrants living in Western societies are easily demonized and their religious culture disparaged, and fundamentalist, indeed, violent acts are themselves very real, some choose to blend in with a certificate of non-dangerousness. Final motive: some convert in order to become real "nationals". Thus the second-generation Hispanics who have become Pentecostals. Or the Chinese workers who return to China as Christians (case study in Israel). Conversion could be the result of vulnerability, pressure, a strategy to get legal papers or to

avoid hatred and discrimination. Given all these reasons, where could be the respect for the religious rights of migrants, where could be the respect for migrants' cultures and religions?