

## **MIGRATION, AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE ECUMENE\***

Cardinal Renato Raffaele *MARTINO*  
President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care  
of Migrants and Itinerant People

Recently, a book entitled “Globus. Per una teoria storico-universale dello spazio” (Globus. Towards a historical-universal theory of space), a translation from German, was published in Italy. In this volume, the author, Franz Rosenzweig, makes a rapid but well-studied, original and significant reconstruction of the whole world history. The first part of the publication is entitled “Ecumene”, seen from the point of view of relationships between earthly forces that push towards the unification of the world.

“If millennia were needed for us to acquire theoretical awareness of the spherical form of the earth,” the author affirms, “we cannot be surprised by how slow world history walks towards unity of the globe. Yet, God created only one sky and one earth. Ecumenism is the final goal of humankind’s journey,” a sign of which is migration, indeed an opportunity for the ecumene.

Today, in fact, migration is one of the most important and most complex challenges of our modern world. Consequently, social transformation, caused by welcoming immigrants, is discussed in public meetings, and the question of “migration” appears as one of the top issues in the international agenda.

The migration phenomenon is therefore analyzed in relation to development. Migrants’ contribution to the labor market is studied, leading to the conclusion that they are important for world economy. A witness to this is the First Global Forum on Migration and Development, recently held in Brussels, last July 9 to 11.

In spite of this, however, many Governments are adopting more restrictive measures to counter immigration, especially if irregular. Researchers on the migration phenomenon, on their part, are for the opening of frontiers, not simply to solve contingent problems, but to situate the process in a global scenario. Migration has indeed become a structural phenomenon. This does not mean, however, that a vision of a “total” and “indiscriminate” freedom to immigrate is being adopted. It is rather the task of Governments to regulate the magnitude and the form of migration flows. They should, however, take common good into consideration, so that immigrants would be worthily welcomed, and the population of the receiving countries would not be put in a condition that would lead them to reject the newcomers. This would have unfavorable consequences both for immigrants and the local population, as well as for relations between peoples. Naturally national common good must

be considered in the context of universal common good. This brings us back to that vision of the “ecumene” that I mentioned at the beginning.

Our task, however, is that of identifying facts and aspects of migration that would help us understand the range of the phenomenon itself. This will enable us to interpret this “sign of the times”<sup>[1]</sup> from a Christian perspective, and to offer our pastoral service to the world of human mobility in its totality, in its universality. And for you, this is true for Europe.

There has always been solicitude on the part of the Catholic Church for migration – we have to take note of this.<sup>[2]</sup> Involvement in various forms confirms its ability to interpret this rapidly changing reality. Active ecclesial commitment, especially at a pastoral level, naturally includes socio-humanitarian action so that the foreigner would be accepted and integrated in society, through an itinerary leading to authentic communion, where there is due respect for diversity. It is however necessary to remember that rights and duties come together, also for migrants.

Regarding respect for the fundamental rights of the human person, hence also of those who are involved in human mobility, the Catholic Church is continuously committed to this at various levels and in different areas. Specific initiatives, Messages of the Holy Father, action to build awareness among international organizations and governments of migrants’ countries of origin, transit and destination, define the Church’s “strategy”. This is based on the central principle and “sacredness” of the human person<sup>[3]</sup>, to be upheld particularly when he/she is unprotected or marginalized. This “brings to light certain important theological and pastoral conclusions. These are: [...] the defence of the rights of migrants, both men and women, and their children; [the question of the migrant family]; the ecclesial and missionary dimension of migration; the reappraisal of the apostolate of the laity; the value of cultures in the work of evangelisation; the protection and appreciation of minority groups in the Church; the importance of dialogue both inside and outside the Church; and the specific contribution of emigration to world peace” (*EMCC* n. 27). In all this, we can clearly see a basis for an ecumenical commitment.

Indeed the recent position of the Holy See regarding migration shows that attention is given to the continuous transformation of the phenomenon of human mobility and to the current needs of people in contemporary society. This is because it wants “to respond to the new spiritual and pastoral needs of migrants” bearing in mind “the ecumenical aspect of the phenomenon, owing to the presence among migrants of Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church, and also the inter-religious aspect, owing to the increasing number of migrants of other religions, in particular Muslims” (*EMCC* n. 3)<sup>[4]</sup>. We cannot ignore the fact that “recent times have witnessed a growing increase in the presence of immigrants of other religions in traditionally Christian countries” (*EMCC* n. 59). The great diversity of immigrants’ cultural and religious origin poses new challenges and leads towards new goals, putting dialogue at the heart of pastoral care in the world of migration. Certainly all this is part of the mission of the Church.

The Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* carefully proposes programs that are appropriate for the various stages in the life of the migrant. It distinguishes “between *assistance* in a general sense (a first, short-term welcome), true *welcome* in the full sense (longer-term projects) and *integration* (an aim to be pursued constantly over a long period and in the true sense of the word)” (n. 42). In this case, it is important to give a sensible

direction to an issue of great significance. I am referring to the difficult concept of integration, and its even more difficult application, keeping in mind also its ecumenical and interreligious aspects, particularly in societies hosting migrants. This concept is being seriously analyzed. We refuse to see it as a process of assimilation, but stress the aspect of cultural meeting and legitimate exchange. We are practically insisting on a concept of intercultural societies, meaning those that are capable of interacting and producing mutual enrichment, going beyond multiculturalism, that can be contented with a mere juxtaposition of cultures[5].

This gradual itinerary – as I was saying – provides, first of all, for “assistance or ‘first welcome’” (*EMCC* n. 43), but this is not enough to express the authentic vocation to Christian *agape*, also because it might be confused with philanthropy.

As a result, the Instruction offers a wider horizon, providing for “acts of welcome in its full sense, which aim at the progressive integration and self-sufficiency of the immigrant” (*ibid.*). Here, too, we cannot fail to consider the ecumenical and interreligious dimensions.

In his Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees this year, Benedict XVI stated that the Church, through its various Institutions and Associations, “has opened Centers where migrants are listened to, Houses where they are welcomed, offices for services offered to persons and families, with other initiatives set up to respond to the growing needs in this field”.[6]

Also through these services in the context of human mobility, the Catholic Church offers its assistance to everyone, without distinction of religion or nationality, respecting everyone’s inalienable dignity as a human person, created to the image of God and redeemed by the Blood of Christ.

In assisting migrants, therefore, it is possible to deepen ecumenical dialogue since contact with those among them who belong to other Churches or Ecclesial Communities gives “new possibilities of living ecumenical fraternity in practical day-to-day life and of achieving greater reciprocal understanding between Churches and ecclesial communities, something far from facile irenicism or proselytism” (*EMCC* n. 56). In fact, when migrants arrive in a place with a Catholic majority, the first meeting point should be hospitality and solidarity, within the context of “an authentic *culture of welcome* (cf. *EEu* 101 and 103) capable of accepting the truly human values of the immigrants over and above any difficulties caused by living together with persons who are different (cf. *EEu* 85, 112 and *PaG* 65)” (*EMCC* n. 39).

Therefore “the entire Church in the host country must feel concerned and engaged regarding immigrants. This means that local Churches must rethink pastoral care, programming it [... appropriately for] today’s new multicultural and pluri-religious context. With the help of social and pastoral workers, the local population should be made aware of the complex problems of migration and the need to oppose baseless suspicions and offensive prejudices against foreigners” (*EMCC* n. 41).

However, ecumenical dialogue does not stop there. It could also take the form of a specifically ecumenical cooperation, whereby resources are pooled and a common Christian witness is given (cf. *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, n. 162). Indeed the different Churches and ecclesial communities are particularly intent on

welcoming and accompanying all migrants, in the pastoral sense, especially when alongside the flow of regular migrants, there are irregular migrants who are a cause for concern and are usually and unjustly blamed for crimes. Also, there are unscrupulous evildoers, who speculate on the tragic situation of people and promote the trafficking of human beings. Their presence increases xenophobia and at times provokes manifestations of racism (cf. *EMCC* nos. 29 e 41). All this can make the ecumenical commitment in favor of migrants more difficult.

The Church is called upon to open a dialogue with everyone, but this “dialogue should be conducted and implemented in the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (*EMCC* 59). At the same time, migrants of other religions “should be helped insofar as possible to preserve a transcendent view of life” (*ibid.*).

There are surely some values in common between the Christian faith and other beliefs, but it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that “beside these points of agreement there are, however, also divergencies, some of which have to do with legitimate acquisitions of modern life and thought” (*EMCC* n. 66). On the part of the migrant, therefore, the first step to take towards the host society is to respect the laws and the values on which that society is founded, including religious ones. If this is not done, then integration would just be an empty word.

The Church is also called to live fully its own identity, without renouncing to give witness to its own faith, also in view of respectfully proclaiming it (cf. *EMCC* n. 9). Thus, dialogue with others “requires Catholic communities receiving immigrants to appreciate their own identity even more, prove their loyalty to Christ, know the contents of the faith well, rediscover their missionary calling and thus commit themselves to bear witness for Jesus the Lord and His gospel. This is the necessary prerequisite for the correct attitude of sincere dialogue, open and respectful of all but at the same time neither naïve nor ill-equipped” (*EMCC* n. 60).[7]

Finally, it is necessary to take into account the important principle of reciprocity[8], “understood not merely as an attitude for making claims but as a relationship based on mutual respect and on justice in juridical and religious matters. Reciprocity is also an attitude of heart and spirit that enables us to live together everywhere with equal rights and duties. Healthy reciprocity will urge each one to become an ‘advocate’ for the rights of minorities when his or her own religious community is in the majority. In this respect we should also recall the numerous Christian migrants in lands where the majority of the population is not Christian and where the right to religious freedom is severely restricted or repressed” (*EMCC* n. 64).

It remains true, however, that solidarity, cooperation, international interdependence and the equitable distribution of the goods of the earth show the need to operate also in ecumenical communion, or rather, with a vision of “ecumene” in the broad sense of the term. This has to be done in depth and forcefully, especially in the areas where migration flows originate, so that the inequalities that induce people, individually or collectively, to leave their own natural and cultural environment would be overcome (cf. *EMCC* nos. 4; 8-9; 39-43). On its part, the Catholic Church will not stop encouraging everyone, but particularly the members of Christian communities, to be authentically available and open to others, including migrants, as it affirms that “notwithstanding the repeated failures of human projects, noble as they may have been, Christians, roused by the phenomenon of mobility, [should] become aware of their

call to be always and repeatedly a sign of fraternity and communion in the world, by respecting differences and practising solidarity, in their ethics of meeting others” (*EMCC* n. 102).

To conclude, we have to acknowledge that migration is a process in constant evolution. It will continue to be present in the development of societies and will bring us more and more into an intercultural world, where legitimate diversity will be lived also in the context of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.