

XVI International Conference

Role of the Catholic Church in the Process of European Integration

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY

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EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY: THE CHALLENGE OF MIGRATIONS¹

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1. Is the EU in crisis?

Today's cultural and political environment in Europe raises a crucial question. Sixty years after the 1957 Treaty of Rome, does the development of the European Union remain a dream, a work in progress or a nightmare?

The ongoing debate on current crises – a slow economic recovery, terrorist attacks, especially the unprecedented high numbers of asylum seekers and migrants – turns these crises into catalysts to question the effectiveness of the European Union. Looking at such a situation, Pope Francis commented on the occasion of the conferral of the Charlemagne Prize:

“In addressing the European Parliament, I used the image of Europe as a grandmother. I noted that there is a growing impression that Europe is weary, aging, no longer fertile and vital, that the great ideals that inspired Europe seem to have lost their appeal. There is an impression that Europe is declining, that it has lost its ability to be innovative and creative, and that it is more concerned with preserving and dominating spaces than with generating processes of inclusion and change. There is an impression that Europe is tending to become increasingly “entrenched”, rather than

¹ Outline: 1. Is the EU in crisis? 2. The role of religion 3. Immigration as a catalyst 4. The story told by the data 5. Immigration as a red light of alarm 6. Conclusion

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open to initiating new social processes capable of engaging all individuals and groups in the search for new and productive solutions to current problems. Europe, rather than protecting spaces, is called to be a mother who generates processes (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 223)."³

There is a continuity of concern for the future of Europe on the part of the Holy See. Already in 2003, St John Paul II had observed that: "Today's Europe... seems to suffer from a profound crisis of values. While possessed of increased resources, it gives the impression of lacking the energy needed to sustain a common project and to give its citizens new reasons for hope.....To give new impetus to its own history, Europe must "recognize and reclaim with creative fidelity those fundamental values, acquired through a decisive contribution of Christianity, which can be summarized in the affirmation of the transcendent dignity of the human person, the value of reason, freedom, democracy, the constitutional state and the distinction between political life and religion" (*Ecclesia in Europa*, nn. 108, 109)

In the State of the Union Address 2016, the President of the European Commission reported on the same malaise and 'existential crisis' facing the EU. President Jean-Claude Juncker remarked: "I have witnessed several decades of EU integration. There were many strong moments. Of course, there were many difficult times too, and times of crisis. But never before have I seen such little common ground between our Member States. So few areas where they agree to work together. Never before have I heard so many leaders speak only of their domestic problems, with Europe mentioned only in passing, if at all. Never before have I seen representatives of the EU institutions setting very different priorities, sometimes in direct opposition to national governments and national Parliaments. It is as if there is almost no intersection between the EU and its national capitals anymore. Never before have I seen national governments so weakened by the forces of populism and paralysed by the risk of defeat in the next elections. Never before have I seen so much fragmentation, and so little commonality in our Union."

³ Pope Francis, *Address*, 6 May 2016.

The founding Fathers of the European Union, on their part, had a clear and optimistic goal in mind when, on 25th March 1957, two treaties were signed in Rome that gave birth to the European Economic Community (EEC) and to the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom): the Treaties of Rome. In the preamble, the signatories of the Treaty declare that: "...determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, resolved to ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action to eliminate the barriers which divide Europe, affirming as the essential objective of their efforts the constant improvements of the living and working conditions of their peoples, recognizing that the removal of existing obstacles calls for **concerted action** intending to confirm the **solidarity** which binds Europe and the overseas countries and desiring to ensure the development of their prosperity, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations; resolved by thus pooling their resources to preserve and strengthen **peace and liberty**, and calling upon the other peoples of Europe who share their ideal to join in their efforts..."

2. The role of religion

These intentions were fleshed out by creating a common market and a customs union and by developing common policies. The result has been a long period of peace and of constant improvement of the quality of life for the peoples involved. The key words used in the treaties – common action, elimination of barriers, solidarity, peace and liberty – reveal the Christian cultural foundation on which the founding Fathers of the European Union were building the new social experiment.

In fact, their Christian faith was at the heart of their vision and was embodied, or became incarnate, in the new political project they were creating.

A recent study explores in detail the background, origins and continuing impact of religion on the attitudes, behaviours and identities of European elites, political parties, interest groups and individuals. It helps also to understand the convergence of views the founding Fathers shared. In

addition, without overstating the meaning of the model proposed, it may contribute to a response today. Nelsen and Guth write:

“Catholicism has for centuries promoted the universality of the Church and the essential unity of Christendom, while Protestantism has valued particularity...These confessional cultures have produced two very different visions of Europe that have deeply influence the process of post-war integration. Catholics have seen Europe as a single cultural entity that is best governed as a single polity. Protestants have never felt part of continental culture and have valued national borders as protectors of liberties that have historically been threatened by the Catholic powers. Catholic have pressed for a politically united Europe, Protestants have resisted sacrificing sovereignty to federal institutions, instead favoring pragmatic cooperation...”⁴

The two traditions are struggling to find a happy balance. In the meantime, the original vocabulary does not seem fashionable any longer. This is evident when the media report the public debate on how the EU manages current crises, and as it becomes especially emotional when dealing with the massive arrival of asylum seekers and immigrants. The current political discourse, in fact, uses words like security, walls, fences, control, national borders, repatriation. The fundamental values referred to by St. John Paul II remain in the background waiting for the opportunity to surface again.

3. Immigration as a catalyst

No doubt, the growing phenomenon of *immigration* has become a catalyst that highlights structural injustices in the world and disruptive frustrations in the countries of the European Union. In both cases, the lack of solidarity and concern for the common good undermines the possibility of development and integration.

With regard to immigration, already in 1891 Pope Leo XIII noted in his great encyclical *Rerum Novarum*: “... men would cling to the country in which they were born, for no one would exchange his country for a foreign

⁴ Brent F. Nelsen and James L. Guth, *Religion and the Struggle for European Union. Confessional Culture and the Limits of Integration*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015, p.IX.

land if his own afforded him the means of living a decent and happy life“ (n.47). The first human right is that of not being forced or obliged to migrate and it is the option preferred even by those who are forced to take the road of exile.

4. The story told by the data

Yet in 2015, 1,200,000 asylum seekers entered the EU. The number of forcibly uprooted people reached 65.3 million, an all-time high since the end of World War II. Among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement. In the world nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution. 250 million persons live and work in a country different from the one where they were born. A new element in this ages-old phenomenon of migration is the high number of children involved. Nearly 50 million children worldwide have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced by conflicts, climate change and extreme poverty. More than half of these children, roughly 28 million, have fled violence and insecurity. Children also represent a disproportionate and growing segment of those who have sought refuge outside their country of birth. A study just released by the World Bank underlines the complexity of the present situation of human mobility:

“Recent crises have forced us to focus on refugees and asylum seekers escaping violence, conflict, or persecution. Refugees and people displaced by such crises – and by natural and man-made disasters in general – are referred to as “forced migrants” to distinguish them from “voluntary migrants,” who are not compelled by immediate events to leave and have more time to choose where and how they will reach their desired destination. The latter are driven by economic factors such as poverty and inequality. In practice, the distinction between forced and economic migration often falls into a grey zone. Motivation for migration is often mixed, with most migrants experiencing a range of economic, political, and social “push factors”. Economic migrants also use the routes used by refugees. And refugees may become economic migrants at some stage, especially when moving to a different country from the first country of

asylum. Refugees and migrants face similar challenges and vulnerabilities, especially in the context of “large movements.”⁵

What does this mixture of forms and motivations tell us – the mix of refugees and immigrants in search of fortune, people seeking to survive wars, persecutions and natural calamities or just looking for a life of dignity for themselves and their families? It tells us many born in the sociological South of the world will continue to move in the decades ahead since this South is unlikely to create the yearly 8-to-9 million new jobs needed to employ the numbers of youth knocking at the doors of the job market.

Migrations are at the heart of history and remain a structural component of our globalized world. In the long run, they bring about benefits for everyone, as experts have shown, for countries of origin and destination and for the migrants and refugees themselves.

5. Immigration as a red light of alarm.

The impact of all these migrants on the EU, however, is obviously quite significant and perceived as even threatening.

First, immigrants challenge European society and its institutions as a whole to seek a just order and forms of coexistence capable of respecting everyone while simultaneously respecting the demands of legality, within a feasible process of integration. If we consider that extreme poverty, underdevelopment, war, and insufficient freedom, which unfortunately still characterize various countries, are among the causes which lead many to leave their own land, there is a need for courageous commitment on the part of all to *bring about a more just international economic order* capable of promoting the authentic development of every people and country.

Second, in parallel with development, peace is absolutely necessary. Most of today’s uprooted people are victims of violent conflicts. The phenomenon of migration challenges Europe's ability to provide for forms of intelligent *acceptance and hospitality*. A “universal” vision of the common good

⁵ *Migration and Development: A Role for the World Bank Group*. August 2016

demands this: we need to broaden our gaze to embrace the needs of the entire human family. The phenomenon of globalization itself calls for openness and sharing, if it is not to be a source of exclusion and marginalization, but rather a basis for solidarity and the sharing of all in the production and exchange of goods. (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, n.100)

Thus, we can say that the forced displacement of so many people is the red light of alarm that something is wrong in the world. Unfortunately, there is a reversal of perception in large segments of the European population, that uprooted people are what is wrong. The victim becomes the culprit. Misperception provokes strong negative reactions and the political consequences turn into fear and instability. But if education is honest with the facts, it will show the European population that newcomers contribute much more with their work, purchasing and taxes than what they receive.

Further, we cannot close our eyes to the responsibility we share in the destabilization of such areas as the Middle East, and the subsequent outflows of people from countries at war. Western powers cannot just wash their hands and leave to others the humanitarian response to the plight of the millions of people forcibly uprooted due to their disastrous policies.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that a culture of welcome does not imply abdication of our way of life. Again, John Paul II provides good guidance when he states that integration "...demands not yielding to indifference regarding universal human values and a concern for safeguarding the cultural patrimony proper to each nation. Peaceful coexistence and the exchange of mutual interior riches will make it possible to build a Europe capable of becoming a home for everyone, in which each person can be welcomed and none will suffer discrimination, where all people are treated responsibly and can live responsibly as members of a single great family." (*Eccl. in Europa*, n. 102)

6. Conclusion

If the way of life inspired by the Christian message vanishes, then integration becomes problematic. Symptomatic is the case of Arek, Arkadiusz Jozwik, a 39-year-old Polish immigrant killed at the end of August in Harlow near London because he was speaking Polish, one of the about 850 thousand

Polish immigrants in the United Kingdom⁶. If the foreigner, the new immigrant is not recognized in his dignity and as an equal member of our human family, a partner in the evolution of a community's identity, then even deadly physical aggression is possible.

The process of integration of immigrants in the member countries of the EU, and the process of integration of these same countries in the EU, are linked together: this double process is based on a culture of solidarity and on the pursuit of the common good. On the two tracks of solidarity and the common good, the EU can move forward toward the future because these are its roots, Christian roots, that provide vital nourishment for its existence. Technical expertise, economic agreements, trade conventions are useful and even necessary, but not sufficient to motivate a community of purpose; a spiritual dimension must be included.

Allow me to conclude with a Talmudic parable. Two brothers living with their families off the same plot of land must separate because a sudden drought causes a shortage of food insufficient to keep all alive. The older brother decides he will emigrate for his and his brother's survival. After many years, the younger brother decides to journey to meet and thank his older brother who had sacrificed himself for him. As he moves along, he spots some movement far away and thinks that wild beasts are coming against him. He hold fast to his walking stick, ready to defend himself. As he advances closer, he realizes that coming in his direction were human persons and he thinks in his fear that they are bandits ready to assault him. But relying on his strong stick, he continues ahead – and finally, face to face with the approaching person, he discovers that it is his brother who has come to meet him.

⁶ Tristan de Bourbon, "Certains n'osent plus parler polonaise dans la rue." *La Croix*, 13.09.2016, p. 6