

# **A Personal Point of View on the Problematic of Forced Emigration Brought Over Europe. The Case of Italy and of The Attitude of the Roman-Catholic Church.**

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**Abstract:** This study is dealing with the relationship between the Roman-Catholic Church and the modern phenomenon of migrations that concerns Europe in this historical period. The Roman-Catholic Church presents contemporaneous migrations as a phenomenon towards which every Christian has the duty to give a positive response, that means, accepting all the migrants in their own countries according to The Holy Scriptures. But some elements as Tradition, Holy Fathers and the spiritual life of the Church, tell us that this is problematic perspective. The reality is different: The Scripture doesn't speak about accepting this fact positively, nor about migrants. His Law isn't a politic law, but a moral law based on the love for our neighbour. And also, this lay approach to the Scripture, brings us to forget God in this question, and that's because a relationship between God and a collective (the migrants) is impossible. The study also deals with many words used today by the Catholic Church instead of the evangelic "neighbour", that doesn't belong to the evangelic spirit, like "the other one". All these arguments want to demonstrate that the theme of the migrants isn't an evangelic theme, and therefore, it is not in the jurisdiction of the Church.

**Keywords:** *migration, foreigner, neighbour, Roman-Catholic Church, racism, globalism*

In the countries in Western Europe which are affected by the problematic of immigration – or as one would say today, the problematic of immigrants – the Roman Catholic Church has taken a very clear position in this sense, probably for the fact that the countries, in which this problem is major, are closest to Africa. According to the Church in Rome, this situation must be faced by directly

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involving in the problematic of immigrants, and their receiving according to the Church's view and pastoral concern.

In one of the most important documents of the Roman-Catholic Church on the subject, which represented the foundation of further documents, we are reading as follows: "The Church in Italy, feeling directly approached in the problematic of migrations offers new perspectives in order to be solved through more spread, more incisive, more at unison a pastoral action"<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the Catholic Church admits the necessity to act in the education sector in order to change consciousness: "The Church in Italy has the intention to restore its fervour for educating consciences and with the purpose of guiding behaviours towards a clear culture of receiving and becoming solidary with the immigrants".<sup>2</sup>

In this way, the old Catholic moral with her task of guarding the cultural identity of the host nation was left away, and this in a country in which the Church is present; this task of guarding the cultural identity must be fulfilled more especially in relation with those cultures and religions which may be considered a threat to the host country, and here we may speak about the nowadays case, for example, of immigration coming from muslim regions. This old optic was reversed and a new one was embraced, which is desired to be considered an "open" moral, closer to the evangelical requests, which personalizes the meeting with the immigrants and also receiving them, as a form of continuity and coherence with more authentic Christian values: "The culture of meeting one another represents the social and ecclesial perspective which may guide the raising up of an open fortress and of a Church, who, Pope Francis is quoted, is called to be always the open house of the Father"<sup>3</sup> This open house may be raised up only with the help of the entire Christian community: "That is why, the Christians' responsibility, and of all good-willed people, is on the increase in creating right away a mentality open to hosting and collaboration"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato*, notiziario della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, a cura della Segreteria Generale, 18 novembre 1993, pag 307: „La Chiesa in Italia, sentendosi direttamente interpellata dal problema delle migrazioni, offre alcuni orientamenti perché sia risolto attraverso un'azione pastorale più capillare, più incisiva e corale.”

<sup>2</sup> *Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato*, notiziario della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, a cura della Segreteria Generale, 18 novembre 1993, pag 317: „La Chiesa che è in Italia intende rinnovare il suo impegno ad educare le coscienze e ad orientare i comportamenti verso una chiara cultura dell'accoglienza e della solidarietà nei confronti degli immigrati.”

<sup>3</sup> Mons. Guerino Di Tora, Presidente Fondazione Migrantes, *Presentazione XXV Rapporto Immigrazione Caritas e Migrantes 2015*, pag 1: „la cultura dell'incontro è la prospettiva sociale ed ecclesiale che può guidare la costruzione di una città aperta e di una Chiesa che – sempre citando papa Francesco – è chiamata ad essere sempre la casa aperta del Padre”

<sup>4</sup> *Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato*, notiziario della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, a cura della Segreteria Generale, 18 novembre 1993, pag 316: „Aumenta, perciò, la responsabilità dei

Therefore, today in the West, a common opinion has been entertained among the elite of clergy - theologians, hierarchs etc – and among many simple believers, that the Church must face this unique phenomenon which regards all of us, about which it has a moral responsibility. Christians must be woken up in their most profound missionary spirit, having the duty to feel this global challenge as a truthful call: “Pope Francesco (...) has confirmed that all believers, together with the good-willed men and women are called to answer to many challenges brought about by the contemporary immigrants in a spirit of generosity, readiness, wisdom and clear vision, each according to their own responsibilities.”<sup>5</sup>

It is affirmed that the phenomenon of immigration is a theme that requires to be dealt with in evangelic vision, and towards which, the answer which the ecclesial community must give, is without doubt the one of their receiving according to the principles of Christian mercifulness. The New Testament teaches us to receive “the other”, to see ourselves as this one, to identify ourselves with this one so that in dealing with him/her we shall practise the commandments that are outlined: “there is an exigent distance covered and sometimes tiring, which our communities cannot withdraw from, our evangelical testimony being at stake. This is about knowing the other in his/her unicity, in dignity, in the invaluable human merit of accepting freedom; it means to recognize one’s peculiarity (of gender, age, religion, culture...) and wishing to allow a place for that one, to accept that one.”<sup>6</sup> Through this acceptance we see and find Christ Himself: “The Lord Jesus Christ makes himself present in each person – no matter the country or culture they belong – and who asks to be received and be solidary with in the spirit of complementariness which is born out of Christian love.”<sup>7</sup>

Roman Catholic Bishops evidence that any limit, which could be set about receiving immigrants at the border of any Roman Catholic country, would be

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cristiani e di tutti gli uomini di buona volontà nel contribuire a creare - e con urgenza - una mentalità aperta alla collaborazione e all’ospitalità.”

<sup>5</sup> *Lettera alle comunità cristiane*, a 25 anni dal documento „Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato” (1993-2018), CEMi – Commissione Episcopale per le Migrazioni della CEI, Roma, 20 maggio 2018, pag. 2: „Papa Francesco (...) ha ribadito che tutti i credenti e gli uomini e le donne di buona volontà sono chiamati a rispondere alle numerose sfide poste dalle migrazioni contemporanee con generosità, alacrità, saggezza e lungimiranza, ciascuno secondo le proprie responsabilità.”

<sup>6</sup> *Lettera alle comunità cristiane*, a 25 anni dal documento „Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato” (1993-2018), CEMi – Commissione Episcopale per le Migrazioni della CEI, Roma, 20 maggio 2018, pag 5: „È un cammino esigente e a volte faticoso a cui le nostre comunità non possono sottrarsi, ne va della nostra testimonianza evangelica. Si tratta di riconoscere l’altro nella sua singolarità, dignità, valore umano inestimabile, di accettarne la libertà; significa riconoscere la sua peculiarità (di sesso, di età, di religione, di cultura,...) e desiderare di fargli posto, di accettarlo.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato*, notiziario della conferenza episcopale italiana, a cura della Segreteria Generale, 18 novembre 1993, pag 317: „E’ il Signore Gesu, infatti, che si fa presente in ogni persona - a qualunque nazione e cultura appartenga - e che chiede di vivere l’accoglienza e la solidarietà nello spirito della gratuità che nasce dalla carità cristiana.”

an intolerable form of discrimination, which would determine again the fall of Christ's Church into the old hypocrisy of reading, uttering, teaching the New Testament without practising its commandments. The borders are a human creation. Christ himself does not teach us about them: "the Church is not the customs but a parents' house where one may find a place with each of his life full of hardships and hard work."<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the entire Bible shows us stories about migration and living abroad: the people of Israel was foreign in Egypt, and Jesus Himself was an immigrant when he left with his family to Egypt. In the New Testament is it not, we wonder, written clearly that: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a foreigner and you received me"? (Matt 25:35) And moreover, that "As to one of these too little brothers of Mine you did all these, to Me you did them" (Matt 25;40).

Therefore, according to the actual Roman Catholic Church the conclusion is clear and the consequences are obvious: as related to the immigrants requiring to enter a Christian country, all truthful Christians have the duty to receive them without any restrictions, not even at the country's borders which would impede the meeting and would send them back to where they came from, and this fact is understood as the Christians' distancing from Christ, this being a premise of the teachings of all the four Evangelists.

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Yet, in spite of these apparent evidence of these considerations, we feel in our heart that there is something wrong affirmed through these conclusions. If we look a little bit further on from this presupposed evidence of things, going beyond the surface, we may understand that some premises and conclusions are prone to suspicion and they raise certain questions and objections. We have personalized four of such objections:

1) First, one cannot ignore the fact that the pressure posed on the Roman-Catholic world to open up in order to receive immigrants comes right from those lay and progressist environments which always had a negative attitude towards the Roman-Catholic world. This negative attitude did not happen in relation with the mistakes the Roman Catholic Church made (paedophilic scandals, corruption etc.), but because the fact that Church tradition has always urged man to transcendency against the immanence of this world, to a so named "anti-scientific" conception about world despite its vast knowledge about it, to an attitude which consolidates patience rather than a revolutionary behaviour. It seems strange that now, there are these environments – lay and progressist – that care about the

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<sup>8</sup> Mons. Guerino Di Tora, Presidente Fondazione Migrantes, *Presentazione XXV Rapporto Immigrazione Caritas e Migrantes 2015*, pag 1: „La Chiesa (...) non e' una dogana, ma la casa paterna dove c'è posto per ciascuno con la sua vita faticosa”.

Church, that the Church gets closer and closer to a perspective – the evangelical one – which they previously despised on and on.

Nevertheless, this lay and progressist perspective, after failing in its revolutionary ideals, has become a real matter in the world-wide and globalist vision which, together with the financial capitalist one, needs the movement of masses in order to create that *melting pot without identity*, without origin and target, which created the man nowadays, a particle of an atom whose single satisfaction and target is the one of avarice and consuming. The Roman Catholic Church has absorbed this mentality, yet masked by religious and spiritual universalism: “The Church develops this task that it has through catechisms, liturgy, mercyfulness and social support activities and at the same time it approves, encourages and sustains any other initiative oriented towards human and cultural instruction. In particular, it personalizes in education and in *mass media*, the premises that become privileged for an education open to globalism.”<sup>9</sup> From this statement of intentions there comes out the real meaning of this “openness” we spoke about: the globalized world created by the materialist capitalism.

2) Making research on the Holy Scripture is a must in order to understand the right way the Church needs to run through, but to consider only the Scripture as the only source of Revelation is a protestant practice which was strange to the Early Christian Church and in consequence, it should be strange to the Roman-Catholic Church nowadays. However, in the Roman - Catholic documents are lacking the references to the Church tradition, and one of the most important cardinals of Rome, in order to urge in receiving immigrants, only founds his action exclusively on *Sola Scriptura*, without any reference to the Holy Fathers: “That is why, believers and the entire ecclesial community must always have these two aspects in their heart and transform into living deeds the words of the Lord: “I was a stranger and you received me” (Matt 25:43).”<sup>10</sup>

We consider that, contrarily, without forgetting the Scripture, one must necessarily also consider the interpretation of the Holy Fathers.

3) What do the Holy Fathers say in this sense? Little, almost nothing. Very few of them say anything against this argument. Someone might object against this saying that the social issue nowadays is very different from the period when

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<sup>9</sup> *Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato*, notiziario della conferenza episcopale italiana, a cura della Segreteria Generale, 18 novembre 1993, pag. 317: „La Chiesa svolge questo suo compito attraverso la catechesi, la liturgia, l’attività caritativa e sociale ed insieme, approva, incoraggia e affianca ogni altra iniziativa orientata alla formazione umana e culturale. In particolare essa indica nella scuola (...) e nei mass media, le sedi privilegiate per un’educazione aperta alla mondialità.”

<sup>10</sup> Camillo Card. Ruini in: *Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato*, notiziario della conferenza episcopale italiana, a cura della Segreteria Generale, 18 novembre 1993, pag. 305: „Perciò i credenti e l’intera comunità ecclesiale (...) devono avere sempre nel cuore e tradurre in scelte di vita le parole del Signore: «ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato» (Mt 25, 43).”

the greatest of the Holy Fathers live – namely, IV<sup>th</sup> and V<sup>th</sup> centuries within the Roman Empire – when the migration phenomena were unknown or of very little importance within that period. But this issue is not correct due to the fact that in the époque of the late Roman Empire, behind the barbarians that were making pressure in order to enter into the Empire by force, were also their families. We speak here about thousands of simple people looking for better living conditions for them and their children.

The Holy Fathers, according to the actual vision, might be considering in their works the hypothesis to have allowed the defeated barbarians enter, once they were disarmed, together with their families by justifying this scenario with evangelical principles that teach us to take care of people, and not take care of the borders. But none of them wrote a word in this sense. Why would that be? Were they mistaken? Or could we better interpret the New Testament better than they?

One may remember the Holy Father Saint John Chrysostomus treating on the theme of the foreigner. Making a comparison between the Homilies of this Holy Father and what we find in the documents of the Roman-Catholic bishops, one cannot neglect the fact that Saint John Chrysostomus considers the foreigners together with the poor so that they, being of a race or foreign language be considered worthy of mercy and attention. Nevertheless, Saint John did not consider the matter of migration as a problem or theme in itself.

4) Dealing with the theme of immigrants as to receive them unconditionally in the name of evangelical commandments, give toil and unrest to our soul rather than peace and spiritual joy, despite of the fact that practising the evangelical commandments should give man a feeling of spiritual sublimity. One should know that this feeling of unrest has nothing to do with the fear towards something unknown – the foreigner himself – but it rather represents its connection with the ultimate nihilism and relativism based on a lack of stability, values, reference points, either material or spiritual, in order to go in the direction of a liquid globalist society in which everything moves faster and faster and the migration phenomenon is one of the sustaining axes.

In this context, the Roman Catholic Church itself tries to justify this pathological state of the human soul in a theological sense: speaking of the encounter with the immigrant man as with a person, in whom the native believer must seek and see Christ himself; the Catholic Church says erroneously that “the Lord lives in the heart of every person created in his image and feeds the restlessness in which he yearns to seek him, even in an unconscious way.”<sup>11</sup> This contradicts the ancient baptismal theology of Church, and also the fact that the presence of

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<sup>11</sup> *Lettera del Consiglio Episcopale Permanente alle comunità cristiane su migrazioni e pastorale d'insieme*, il consiglio permanente della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, Roma, 21 novembre 2004, p. 274: „Il Signore, infatti, vive nel cuore di ogni persona creata a sua immagine e alimenta l'inquietudine che tende alla ricerca di lui, anche in modo inconsapevole.”

Lord Jesus in the believer souls never produces restlessness in man, but mostly desire, in which he yearns to seek Him. It can become restlessness, if the man does not have a pure heart, but keeps hidden passions that come between him and the Lord, and prevents the union that is a source of only peace and fullness. This spiritual mistake is the sign that this whole context of openness to the other and attention to the foreigner is not correctly addressed in the spiritual sense, but rather it is another way from the innumerable penetrations of the progressive mentality into the Christian religion.

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After these considerations, we can understand that the conclusions reached by the Roman Catholic Church, regarding the reception of immigrants, presented at the beginning, are wrong. This means that there is a certain distance between these conclusions and the Holy Gospel. In order to understand, if indeed the phenomenon of migration is an evangelical theme, and to what extent it enters into the Savior's commandments, we must resume all the considerations from the beginning and we must start from certain theological premises without which the whole research deviates into a wrong direction.

The starting point for a correct understanding of the immigration issue, if we want to rely only on Scripture, is found in the following passage from the Gospel of Matthew: "One of them (Pharisees), a teacher of the Law, tempting Jesus, asked: Teacher, which commandment is greater in the Law? He answered him: <Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind>. This is the great and first commandment. And the second, like this: <Love your neighbour as yourself>. (Matthew 22:35-39). It is obvious that the moral behaviour towards the neighbour must be framed in the spiritual domain, this being clarified by the first commandment which concerns our spiritual attitude of love towards God.

With this awareness, we can also read with new eyes the passage that immigration theorists base on the supposed duty to welcome all immigrants: "Was I hungry and you gave me food, Was I thirsty and you gave me drink, Was I a stranger and you received me"? (Matthew 25:35) And "as you did it to one of the least of these of my brothers, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40)

What do we understand from these biblical passages, which are obviously related?

The Roman Catholic Church simply explains this expression of the Savior as a moral duty: "And our region is required to receive as many women, men and minors as possible, who descend on the shores of the Land. (...) We, the Bishops, resolutely share in the exhortations that Pope Francis always addresses, regarding their reception. They spring from the most authentic evangelical spirit".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Messaggio dei Vescovi Liguri per l'accoglienza dei profughi*, Genova, 16 giugno 2015, p. 1: „Infatti, anche alla nostra terra è richiesto di accogliere un numero crescente di donne, uomini e

Yet it is not difficult to go beyond the surface and understand that there is no moral duty for Christians to the foreigner himself, as an individual who presents himself at a border.

First of all, because they cannot be included in the evangelical command of Matthew 22, not being “the other”, but people who are spoken of in the abstract and who cannot be seen or met. Of course they can be framed in a moral vision, but it would be a natural morality and anyway not evangelical or Christian.

Second, the context in which the reception of the foreigner in Matthew 25 develops is the last judgment, when Christ will come to separate the goats from the sheep. It is a collection of what has been done in man’s life, not a commandment for what man must do. It’s the end, not the beginning. This means that it is a sufficient condition for salvation, not a necessary one: the thief on the cross never received anyone with love in his life, but he was the first man to be saved.

A commandment indeed exists, but it is related to love, not to the reception of strangers, and the difference is not small: love is the first commandment, because through it passes every human action intended to be pleasing to God and to give man salvation; including everything that concerns the other, and the stranger in Matthew 25 must also be assimilated to.

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And here we touch on the second evangelical subject, that is, the beneficiary of love: the neighbour (the other).

Man must love his neighbour: this is the commandment. But who is “the neighbour”? Obviously, as it is implicit in the etymology of the name, the one that is “close” to us, in such a way that it is known to us, that we can relate to him in an immediate way. This kind of love excludes any discrimination, because it is immediate, it is natural, or rather, it is supernatural, it is divine love. It does not differentiate if the neighbour is native or foreign, believer or atheist, Christian or pagan, white or black. True Christian, evangelical love is love for the person in front of us, with whom we can establish a relationship, which goes beyond the limits imposed by society or customs.

But if that person is not in this condition, that is, he is far from us - as is the case with immigrants, whom we see through a television screen or in a newspaper - we cannot speak of Christian or evangelical love in any way. Other feelings can come into play, both good and noble, and useful - for example solidarity, sense of duty, economic calculation - but not immediately Christian love. In this case, the Gospel cannot be called into question, nor should the Church be involved in any way in this kind of phenomena. Other are the subjects - political, economic,

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minori che sbarcano sulle coste del Paese. (...) Noi Vescovi decisamente facciamo nostri gli inviti all'accoglienza che ripetutamente Papa Francesco rivolge. Sono dettati dal più autentico spirito evangelico.”

social - that must be implied. If one is afflicted with a sense of guilt towards a collective of migrants, who come from a country stricken with misery, who are seen on television, this is not a form of Christian love (probably not even secular love). Whatever it is, it belongs to the secular environment, not the Christian one.

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Such a feeling of guilt would also be justified, since the Christianization of non-European peoples was done by the Roman Catholics and the Protestants in non-Christian forms, that is, thinking first about material goods and temporal power, and only later to the souls. However, this behaviour had a price to pay that can be seen today, because the migratory movements that Europe is affected by are usually put in relation - at least in part - with colonialism and neo-colonialism.

The Roman Catholic Church makes itself the bearer of a sense of guilt that is partly justified from a historical point of view, but not from a religious point of view. Just today we would expect from the Western Churches an unwavering opposition at least against immigrants belonging to other religions, who may constitute a threat to Christianity in the future perspective, if they will engage in proselytizing. But the Roman Catholic Church no longer has either the power or the will: it is unwavering in its opposition to the traditionalists who want to keep the mass in Latin (*Vetus ordo*) but lenient to the priests who turn their parishes into a reception centre for immigrants, or even read the Koran after the liturgical service.

The opposition to the phenomenon of contemporary migrations is seen by the Roman Catholic Church as an opposition to institutional realities. The European Union supports the immigration policy by funding NGOs that physically bring immigrants to Europe, and uses anti-racist blackmail in order to defend themselves ideologically. But on the other hand, the European Union also supports the emigration policy in the countries of origin, through funding immigrant recruitment companies, because they find jobs in Europe for them or in the civilized world. In this institutional perspective, just to advance the idea of closing the borders, is declared as a violation of human rights, a crime in fact, if not even (for the Italian press) a re-editing of the phenomenon of the gas chambers (sic!).

Impotence and bad faith are mixed in the Roman Catholics' theological view. For them, being liked by lay philo-immigration circles is more important than coherence with the Christian tradition. The fact that the secular and political circles are using this migratory phenomenon as an opportunity to weaken or even destroy what is left of Christianity in Europe, is not enough reason for them to react against these attacks masked by moral intentions.

But when morality should be called into question to denounce the exploitation of immigrants, the Roman Catholic Church is silent: the suffering of immigrants is worthy of being denounced when they are passing by sea to the ports of Italy, or when they work as slaves for the new exploiters in Europe, but the

indignation of the Catholic clergy is at weakness. Basically, this is the goal of philanthropy-capitalism, that is, to link economic exploitation with humanitarian actions, in a way that is hard to notice. The condition of existence in a developed country is promoted as preferable in itself, and for this reason, the labour force is already selected in the countries of origin, for the interests of multinational groups and other economic subjects. The real exploitation will take place in European countries, but in order to physically get there, cultural-ideological identification is required, and anti-racist blackmail is perfectly suited for this purpose. The gradual destruction of the Christian ethos is not only a consequence of the economic situation, but for the political dimension it is also a priority, since the European Union bases its power on a technocratic, therefore atheistic and non-Christian, materialistic reality.

The Roman Catholic Church has therefore become a cultural subject that tries to legitimize the new globalist and universalist ideology of the postmodern world, for which immigration is one of the most powerful means to achieve the final goal. Of course, there are still many oppositional attitudes in the Church of Rome in this regard, especially in the ethical field (divorce, abortion, homosexual marriages, etc.), but the path towards a secular organization carrying a non-Christian ethic is marked.

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Also of a secular nature, another novelty appears today. The Roman Catholic Church is borrowing some terms from the profane lexicon to represent Christian concepts, with the result that a concept from the Christian tradition can be used alongside another, from the progressive culture. So, we must be careful not to confuse concepts that are very different, although they are somewhat similar. In our case, we can find some Roman Catholic documents, in which instead of the evangelical word “neighbour” the word “the other” is used. For example, in this passage, where it is about meeting the stranger, it is noted that “the sin is to let these fears determine our responses, condition our choices, compromise respect and generosity, feed hatred and refusal. The sin is to give up the encounter with the other, the encounter with the different, the encounter with the neighbour, which in fact is a privileged opportunity to encounter the Lord.”<sup>13</sup>

We have here two kinds of languages mixed up in a text that feeds the confusion. First of all, “neighbour” is not “the other”, for the simple reason that the

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<sup>13</sup> *Lettera alle comunità cristiane*, a 25 anni dal documento „Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato” (1993-2018), CEMi – Commissione Episcopale per le Migrazioni della CEI, Roma, 20 maggio 2018, pag. 4: „Il peccato è lasciare che queste paure determinino le nostre risposte, condizionino le nostre scelte, compromettano il rispetto e la generosità, alimentino l’odio e il rifiuto. Il peccato è rinunciare all’incontro con l’altro, all’incontro con il diverso, all’incontro con il prossimo, che di fatto è un’occasione privilegiata di incontro con il Signore.”

neighbour is close, while the “other” recalls a sense of distance. The same can be said for “the different one” when speaking about neighbour, because in his neighbour, the Christian must find himself, that is, an identity, not a diversity. Much more, in this “other”, one cannot meet the Lord, because the Lord is not an “other”, but is the closest to man, if man recognizes him. Here the materialistic conception of the world, based on a diversity that cannot be synthesized into a higher unity, but which remains an irreducible reality, is masked with a Christian and spiritual meaning, while it belongs to a world as far away from Christ as possible. In addition, terms such as “meeting”, “respect” and “generosity” that belong only to Christianity are used, but the word used by the Lord himself in his evangelical commandment: “to love” is missing. Obviously, all this terminology shows nothing but that the foreigner, as seen by the Roman Catholic Church, cannot at all be assimilated to the Christian neighbour, who rather identifies with the poor, with the needy, regardless of whether he is a foreigner or an autochthonous person.

In addition, the attention is for those who stay far away, it is a question of a selection, of a reckoning, while Christian love is immediate, direct, and looks at the one who needs here and now, the one we have in front of us, the one I see and know, talk to, interact with. Love of neighbour cannot say “this yes, that no,” because this behaviour is the fruit of a cold, unloving mind; at most, it is a manifestation born of a moral duty, of a programmed solidarity.

The Holy Fathers always insisted on the need to help all the poor: foreigners and those who came from a different culture, who spoke an unknown language, who were of an unseen race... but they never urged the believers to take care of a particular category, whatever it may be! Doing so would put all the other “categories” of the poor on the back stage, which would be absurd and completely unfair: who could say that a terminally ill cancer patient needs help more than a man who has nothing to eat? Who can say that a man who is cold and has nowhere to sleep the next night takes precedence over a man who tried to kill himself a few hours ago? One cannot help one’s neighbour through a priori predefined categories. A secular association can make such a prioritization, but not the Church.

Now, the Roman Catholic Church behaves in the same way: always talking about immigrants as a needy category, being silent about the other “categories” - even holding special Masses for immigrants!<sup>14</sup> - actually means to imply that immigrants have priority over others in need, which cannot be accepted. But the Roman Catholic Church tries to justify this choice in helping immigrants, affirming that Christ himself expressed a preferential love for the poor: “He, who softened for the multitudes who are <like a sheep without a shepherd> (Mk 6:34)

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<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis himself has officiated a „Santa Messa per i Migranti”, namely: A Holy Mass for the Immigrants („Sfântă Liturghie pentru migrații”) at Basilica di San Pietro in Rome, on Friday 6 July 2018.

he asked his disciples to have a preferential love for the poor, among whom immigrants can be counted".<sup>15</sup> But this statement is a huge doctrinal error, which is completely unacceptable: Christ loved and loves all people equally, not only the poor, but also the rich. Christ loves every sinner, regardless of whether he is rich or poor, because God's love is like rain, which descends on the good man as well as on the bad man. God's love does not discriminate, it cannot be preferential. If Christ showed more sympathy towards the poor, it comes from the fact that the poor are in a material condition that is more favourable to receive God's love, they are willing to understand him better. The poor will have priority in entering the Kingdom of Heaven not because God loves them more, but because they will have received the Gospel message faster and more.

Instead, the Roman Catholic Church, reasoning and acting with this preferentiality, there seem to have interests of proselytism rather than those imposed by evangelical love: "To be able to cohabit within this horizon [ie: pastoral] and the world of migrations, asks that they be perceived as a providential missionary resource. The foreign presence in Italy really represents a specific and increasingly relevant field of action for the work of evangelization."<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the first Christian missionaries never thought of pagan peoples as a "resource" for their mission!

Having made all these distinctions, it will be easier for us to discuss another Biblical passage. It is taken from among the many from the Old Testament, which talks about the foreignness and wandering of Israel and which the immigration theorists from the Roman Catholic Church put as basis, as a supposed duty of Christians, to welcome immigrants: "If any stranger settles in your land, do not oppress him. The foreigner who has settled with you shall be to you as your native; you shall love him as yourselves, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Lv 19: 33-34) Unlike the quote from Matthew 25:35, here the Lord speaks of welcoming the stranger as a moral duty, from which no believer can escape. However, as in the quoted New Testament passage, the foreigner is spoken of only in the singular, not in the plural. Obviously in this case, as in the Gospel according to Matthew, welcoming the stranger is still assimilated with love for the neighbour. In addition, here the command to love is explicitly spoken by the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ero forestiero e mi avete ospitato*, notiziario della conferenza episcopale italiana, a cura della Segreteria Generale, 18 novembre 1993, pag. 308: „Egli, che si commuove per le folle che sono “come pecore senza pastore” (Mc 6, 34) ha chiesto ai suoi discepoli di avere un amore preferenziale per i poveri, tra i quali possono essere annoverati anche i migranti.”

<sup>16</sup> *Lettera del Consiglio Episcopale Permanente alle comunità cristiane su migrazioni e pastorale d'insieme*, il consiglio permanente della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, Roma, 21 novembre 2004, pag. 273: "Per poter collocare dentro questo orizzonte anche il mondo delle migrazioni, si richiede che queste siano avvertite come risorsa provvidenziale di missionarietà. La presenza straniera in Italia, infatti, rappresenta uno specifico e sempre più rilevante campo d'azione per l'opera di evangelizzazione."

Lord in the same text. But we have seen immigrants, as a social group, cannot be assimilated to the neighbour, so this biblical passage shows in a way even more clearly, that it cannot be taken as support for the policy of welcoming immigrants by the Roman Catholic Church.

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The third evangelical subject - after love and the neighbour - the most important, and for this reason put behind as all-encompassing, is the presence of God in the relationship of love. Loving one's neighbour must be done by loving God together, or rather Him, because the first commandment concerns God and then the neighbour. But to have the presence of God in the heart, in the relationship of love, is to have the unifying presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of unity; which in turn presupposes that this relationship be made between a person and another person - human or divine - as is the relationship of love between man and God and between a man and his neighbour. A relationship of Christian love cannot be established - and I wonder, probably not even a relationship of human love - between a man and a collective, because the Holy Spirit simply cannot be present, and the feeling of warm love would turn into a feeling of cold solidarity; which is not necessarily something negative, on the contrary, but it is not related to the Church and the Gospel.

It is true that God also loved the people of Israel, who are not one person; but even in this case, we are not dealing with a simply collective reality, but with a subject endowed with a soul, which abides in the alliance and covenant with God in the common testament and promise. That is why Israel was a community rather than a collective.

In the case of the collective, of immigrants arriving at a border, on the contrary, there is no common element that can unify it, so that it can be said that they make up a community. In addition, immigrants often come from different countries, have different cultures and even different beliefs: therefore, in most cases they do not even have an identity.

In the end, I came to a simple and clear conclusion: the topic of human migrations is not an evangelical topic, nor is the reception of immigrants at the border; it is not a topic that concerns the Church. The Church must not be involved in these matters, such as the issue of the integration of immigrants into society, which has nothing to do with the evangelical spirit, but rather concerns voluntary associations, sociology or economics institutions.

The topic of immigrants must be detached from the Gospel: whoever speaks about these topics, treats them individually, as a political or economic subject, and any member of the Church, even priests or bishops, are obviously free to express their opinion on this matter, as well as with regard to all other social themes. But the Church has no duty to express such an opinion: the Church is not called

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to give an answer to this great contemporary theme, as, moreover, the Roman Catholic Church believes. There is no Christian duty to express oneself in these matters, nor -much more- to be favourable to the reception of immigrants at the border. Let us be careful not to fall into the traps of the enemy!