

CST on Migration¹

By Anna Rowlands

Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today – it's a great privilege to be able to be here and listening to your reflections and reports on the work of Caritas.

What I intend to do in the next 30 minutes is to outline three things:

- a) the background to the development of the Church social teaching on migration
- b) some of the additional resources that lie within the wider social tradition that might help us think theologically about migration in the current context
- c) brief concluding note on Islam, migration and dialogue.

The development of CST on Migration

Migration has been a significant theme for the church's social teaching since at least the 1850's. The migrations out of Europe to the Americas in mid nineteenth century saw a new need to make provision for the religious and pastoral needs of Catholic migrants. A century later, and following the catastrophe of war, this pastoral, social and spiritual work developed into a more overtly theological set of reflections. The Church's most significant document on migration *Exsul Familia* was published in 1952 – and had an immediate effect on the way that the Catholic community reflected on migration. *Exsul Familia* introduced a series of new reflections into CST:

- EF introduced the idea that we should be reading the biblical and thinking about doctrine as reflection on the reality of migration. The Holy Family were both the models and protectors for all displaced persons, the Church had always understood that it had a role in exercising the works of mercy, towards migrants.
- EF also drew on Pius XII's great wartime emphasis on human dignity and argued that forced migration was a threat to human dignity and security.

¹ Present article is based on the presentation “*CST on Migration*” delivered by Anna Rowlands during the Caritas Europa Leadership Forum on 10 May 2017 in Brussels, Belgium.

Later Vatican documents on migration – including John Paul II’s updating of *Exsul Familia* entitled *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, deepen this theological reflection further:

- The Old Testament themes of Exodus and Covenant are used to remind the Church that Christians are called to live out of the exilic memory, of the truth that they were and will always be spiritual strangers in a foreign land.
- The prophetic tradition is drawn upon to offer a vision of hospitality and care for the stranger and the oppressed,
- and we are reminded about the uncomfortable truth that God chooses the displaced and the stranger to be difficult and mysterious messengers of his Truth - a truth we (including the Church) often do not wish to hear. These biblical prophets often reveal our own departure as ‘settled’ people from faithfulness. (A theme Pope Francis has given his own ‘spin’ to – we will return to Francis!)
- Drawing from the New Testament *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* notes the migration of God himself through history in the ministry of Christ. Jesus repeats the journey of the people of God into exile, and in entirely practical terms he aids the stranger and tells us to do likewise.²
- From the book of Revelation and from the Pentecost narrative key lessons are drawn for the way that the Church should understand herself. The Church of Pentecost is presented as an ever more vast and diverse intercultural society. What is also interesting is that occasionally church documents also note the significance of the line in Revelation in which we are told that people from every nation, every tribe, every people will be presented before the throne of the Lamb. A significance is given not only to individuals (as we like to think of people in the West) but also to the preservation of human cultures. This text in Revelation might hint to us at reasons we should grieve when ancient cultures are obliterated by military and economic interests, (it matters that both the Yazidis and the Christians are slaughtered),

² See discussion of the biblical context and figure of Christ as refugee in *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, 2004).

- Perhaps above all the Church's documents on migration challenge our culture to move away from two poor choices in the way that we see migrants: either as threats to peace and order and prosperity or as suffering victims in need of salvation. The theological tradition presents migrants as self-determining but also interdependent human agents whose agency and dignity must be engaged and protected. This is a subtle theme in CST and much more could probably be made of it to counter the reduction of migrants to suffering victim or dangerous alien themes. None of this is to say that there is not overwhelming suffering, sorrow and loss but to note that we cannot reduce migrants humanity to this alone. Again, we will return to the suffering theme when we look at Pope Francis' contribution.

Over the course of the last 50 years this biblical and doctrinal material has also been used to develop a set of natural law principles to guide the practice of human government in matters of migration:

1. Catholic social teaching begins with the principle of peace: it proposes a "right to stay or to remain" – the right not to be displaced.³ We all need membership of a stable covenantal community to survive and it is the duty of those who govern to provide the conditions for this stability. This principle has clear implications for conflict-resolution and development policies addressed to the root contexts of displacement.

2. However, governments often fail in this task. And so the second principle states: where there is conflict, persecution, violence or hunger there exist natural and absolute rights of the individual to migrate and a natural right to seek sanctuary within an alternative 'safe' political community.⁴

³ See *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi (The Love of Christ Towards Migrants)*, (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, 2004)

⁴ See Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes (The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World)*, 1965, n.65.

3. This implies a third principle: a moral requirement that nation states receive the refugee. We all have an inalienable membership of a universal human family, AND we seek membership of a political community in order to live well. The task of human government is to recognise both these goods – because I am a member of the human family I have a right to a place of safety.

4. For these same reasons CST offers a fourth principle: the (imperfect) right of a sovereign political community to regulate borders and control migration. CST has not thus far proposed completely open borders. But neither does it recognise borders as divinely ordained, as claimed by some other Christian traditions. Rather, in CST borders are conceived as a relative good and recognised as legitimate only insofar as they both protect the common good of the established community and are porous and humane. Political communities are invited to include within the exercise of sovereignty the establishment and oversight of just measures for those who arrive seeking sanctuary and for effective global governance, to minimise and accommodate migration flows as well as to understand the pressures on local communities and to act to foster the local common good of a city or district.⁵

5. Finally, recognising the nature of the human person and their dignity, the Church teaches a need for both migrant participation and contribution to a host society and therefore a responsibility to enable real social, economic, civic, political participation of the migrant in the host community.⁶ To fail to do so offends against the requirements of contributive and social justice.

⁵ See Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*, (Encyclical On Human Development in Charity and Truth), Vatican City (2009), n.62.

⁶ See John Paul II, *Message for the Day of Migrants and Refugees*, (Vatican City, 2001), n.3. See also, on the question of just legislation to enable integration and participation in host communities, John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (Encyclical On Human Work), (Vatican City: 1981), n.23.

Pope Francis and migration

Pope Francis' own contribution to addressing the question of migration has been rather different in style and tone to his recent predecessors. Firstly, Francis has insisted on making personal journeys to be with those who are making their migrant journeys. He describes these journeys as a 'gestures of closeness'.⁷

Whilst in Lampedusa Francis delivered a now famous homily which began with a reflection on the first two questions which God asks humanity in the Scripture: Adam, where are you? Cain where is your brother?⁸ Francis interprets these passages as stories of human disorientation, of the first signs of a tendency in humankind to lose our place within creation, to lose our orientation as creatures towards a creator. Thus to Fall is to be disorientated, to lose our bearings.

It is interesting that Francis juxtaposes an account of the disorientation of the settled in relation to the orientation of the displaced. In order to identify what might be going wrong in a failure to respond adequately to the challenge of the displaced, we must first see our own disorientation. Francis roots this disorientation not only in a classic account of the Fall, but also in the features of our own times: he draws attention to the culture of wellbeing. The culture of wellbeing breeds indifference towards others. Part of the culture of wellbeing is to become accustomed to the suffering of others. Our own transient cultural ways breeds indifference towards truly transient people. Thus globalization, which creates ironically the transience of the settled, produces too as its by-product, the globalisation of indifference. In turn the by-product of the culture of indifference is that we ourselves become anonymous – we seem unable to understand ourselves as named, particular and responsible in relation to named, particular and responsible others. 'The globalization of indifference makes us all 'unnamed', leaders without names and without faces.'⁹

⁷ Text of Pope Francis' homily:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html (last accessed 22.4.15.)

⁸ The narrative of Cain and Abel is a trope to which Francis has returned on numerous occasions, most recently in his treatment of integral ecology in *Laudato Si'*.

⁹ See link to Lampedusa sermon above.

This indifference and anonymity is the opposite of the Creator-creature relationship, through which we are named, and as named beings we are called to account for other named beings. Adam, where are you? Cain, where is your brother? This approach to the ethics of migration deals less with the external borders of the nation state and more with the prior internalised borders of the human will as the 'matter' of a theological ethics. These two sets of borders – one geopolitical and one interior to the human self – are read against each other. Francis wishes us to see the deep, practical interconnections between these two sets of borders.

However, two other comments on Francis' teaching should be made: in *Laudato si'*, Francis connects the failure of law to a deep failure in civil society. Indifference to migrant suffering in Europe suggests not just the failure of government or the individual but 'the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded.'¹⁰ Civil society is the context in which compassion must be generated and kept alive: a failure of compassion in the case of migrant welcome indicates for Francis a failure of civil society to be itself as much as failures in state political leadership.

Finally, and perhaps most controversially for some, the notion that the social teaching of the Church should lead us back towards a willingness to suffer as a form of solidarity is an emerging hallmark of Francis' pontificate. Francis' contrast between a 'well-being' culture that seeks to protect the person from the suffering of others and a Christian social ethics, which seeks ways to take the suffering of others into the life of the self, is sharp and deliberate. In *Laudato Si'* Francis goes as far as to suggest this defines the very task of Catholic social teaching itself: 'Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.'

¹⁰ *Laudato Si'*, paragraph 25.

Further resources:

In the short time I have left I will now do two things briefly – point to two areas which are perhaps a little neglected but could be very significant elements of our resources for thinking in fresh and challenging ways about our context, and then say a little in conclusion at Jorge’s request about Islam and CST.

Whilst the Christian tradition has lots of material for thinking theoretically about migration it also has a history of Christian practice guided by the Holy Spirit. Chief in this area is the history of offering sanctuary and asylum. Our current national and international asylum laws relate to a history of offering refuge that has its roots in the biblical Jewish cities of sanctuary and Christian practices of offering territorial sanctuary in Churches and monasteries. Only from the 16th C onwards did the state begin to take over this practice and formalise asylum laws. Gradually this became something the state did and not the Church. Whilst no-one suggests reversing this process this history has been the inspiration for a global movement of cities of sanctuary who have been reinventing the tradition of offering sanctuary as a form of local, often faith based humanitarianism. Rethinking forms of Christian sanctuary for a very different age is something that the Churches are now beginning to do in quite important ways. There is an important space of imagination here. (I don’t have time today to do more than simply name this practice).

A further area where I think there is significant resource for thinking differently and challenging structures of power relates to the deeper Catholic tradition of thinking about the nature of the good.

Over the last few years, in work I have done with immigration detainees I began to notice the use of a particular kind of language in reflecting on that experience: the language of good and evil. I also began to notice that this same language of good and evil has reinvented itself in public life – deserving and undeserving migrants, good migrants stay in camps and wait for international rescue, bad migrants forge their own path etc. And it struck me that a) detainees were using this language very carefully to make sense of their experience and b) that this

public language is used in ways that Christians should have a problem with – and an answer to. This got me thinking about St Augustine. Augustine understands evil – not as a thing or an independent substance or a person but rather as ‘the process through which the good is lost’. Evil happens when people – and systems – repeatedly turn away from the possibility of the good.

Listening to the experience of those on the move who are seeking status it is not difficult to spot processes which formalize the absence of human goods: detention, destitution, the manner in which human contact is conducted etc. However, any discussion of what is wrong about the current system throws us back theologically on what is intended to be prior to failure – that is an account of the human goods we strive for. The theological story always starts with questions of the good. And in this case this includes discussion about individual goods, public goods, common goods and so forth. And yet one of the most striking things about recent public policy on migration is the absence or when present often the confusion over what constitutes a genuine vision of the good that we might pursue. Here I think Caritas organisations can play a crucial role in at least three ways:

- 1) to articulate the visions of the good and the processes through which those goods are lost as you see them on the ground for migrants you work with.
- 2) To challenge the basis of public policy in the light of these experiences, asking ‘why’ in relation to the mechanisms of the system and challenging the system to pursue genuine individual, public and common goods through law.
- 3) Populism teaches us that there is a failure to understand the full range of goods that matter to people in everyday life: whether the settled population or those on the move. We do not have mechanisms for engaging well with these ordinary losses of the good that create anger and resentment, depression and disengagement, nor for the vision. Our CST tradition of thinking about the good offers us a language for dialogue about a sense of what has been lost and is under threat as well as about visions of the good (individual, public, common) that we wish to pursue. These are

conversations that need to be had across and between hosts and migrants, class groups, nation states.

Jorge asked me whether I would say something very briefly about the question of migration, Islam and CST. I will be brief, partly because not much has been written yet on this question and partly because I am not an Islam specialist myself. However, what I will do is note some of the resources that do exist within the writings of Pope Francis. Before I do that I'd like to note some questions of context:

1. Historically we have thought of Islam in Europe as our cultural 'Other'. For some this has been on the basis of a difficult history of tension and conflict and displacement, for others it is a more mythical notion. Nonetheless, we are now encountering Muslims, through processes of migration, as near neighbours and fellow citizens as well as those held at distance who are asking for assistance under international law. We are undertaking this new engagement with Muslim neighbours in the context of a global terror threat as well as our historical narratives about Islam. This is a complex process for which we lack adequate resources.
2. In Europe we have imagined that faith's main dialogue partner is secularism – and we have trained ourselves to negotiate this dialogue. We will now need to train ourselves for a different kind of faith dialogue with Islam. The Muslim population of Europe currently stands at about 7%, by the end of this century it is expected to rise to about 1/4.
3. Much of the public rhetoric is about Islam as threat to Christian Europe. This is a huge complex theme and I can't take this on now. I would, however, say the following: we are wondering whether Europe itself and European Christianity will be transformed by the presence of Islam. It almost certainly will. For some this is a worrying thought, but for others it offers possibilities – that we might learn something about articulating our values as something distinctive and that we might as Pope Francis says, come to see our task as Christians as occupying time rather than simply colonising space. The presence of Muslims as neighbours will and should alter the Qs that we focus on – that is not necessarily a bad thing. But this challenge may be a gift as much as a difficulty for us.

These words of Pope Francis are taken from the text of *Evangelii Gaudium*. In this document, under the heading of social teaching, the Pope outlines four principles for guiding for engaging in social renewal and I think each of these can act as a guide for thinking about the migration, Islam, Europe question:

1. Time is greater than space
2. Unity prevails over conflict
3. Realities are more important than ideas
4. The whole is greater than the part

What does he mean by each of these and what is implied about dialogue?

Francis asks us to remember that the Gospel is not about occupying territorial space but rather finding ways to take part in the redemption of time. We must commit ourselves to real human processes which enact the good rather than to shoring up power and territory. This requires us to think about the processes of our organisations and how they contribute to a presence of the good over time rather than simply occupying space.

Unity prevails over conflict – there is a fundamental social unity which can be found and discerned if we refuse to be distracted by conflict – it is much easier to see grounds for conflict and competition than to discern (and I use the word deliberately) the fundamental unity of reality. Interreligious engagement needs to seek this reality. Francis defines dialogue as an openness to truth and love. Openness to truth requires us to talk about differences in order to seek unity. He talks about a dialogue that seeks communion but not necessary consensus. This strikes me as a very important way of seeing the common good in Europe right now.

Realities are more important than ideas – Francis talks about the willingness to look at how things really are and see our times for what they are. This might mean a willingness to approach Islam afresh and to understand a) Islam from the viewpoint of a Muslim b) to grasp the historical legacy and its meaning for both Christians and Muslims.

The whole is greater than the parts – Francis talks about the whole not as a sphere – with one centre point and peripheries, one monotonous whole, but as a polyhedron has many surfaces and is a more awkward unity – it is multifaceted, its multiple forms constitute the whole. Francis uses this image to call for a form of globalisation that is not monotonous, eradicating human difference or uninterested in difference.

Francis returns again and again to his idea of social peace – these four practices we have just discussed contribute to the development of what Augustine would have seen as social peace, something not fully peaceful as God intends, but something that still has great and lasting value and is the goal of all social governance – whether in civil society or nation states. Peace is not just the absence of violence or warfare but the abiding commitment to upholding justice, dignity, solidarity and the common good – and therefore promoting the integral development of people and peoples. Peace is not therefore a negotiated settlement – either a contract or, as I might remind Theresa May, a divorce settlement – but rather ‘a conviction that the unity brought by the spirit can harmonise every diversity’.

There are of course complex doctrinal questions for Catholic-Muslim dialogue, but these are not the issues that the social teaching of the church addresses. The church social teaching is committed to the search for the justice and the peace of the city, not for its own sake, but for the redemption of all.



Dr Anna Rowlands is currently St Hilda Associate Professor of Catholic Social Thought & Practice in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University.

She is also the founding chair of a national network organisation, the Centre for Catholic Social Thought and Practice, that links together academics and practitioners committed to developing Catholic social teaching in the academy and throughout civil society.

She teaches political theology and her research focuses on migration, religion and politics, Catholic and Anglican social traditions, concepts of the common good and human dignity and the work of social philosophers Gillian Rose and Hannah Arendt.