



The Religious and Migration in the 21st Century: Perspective, Response and Challenges.

22nd – 24th February, 2016.

Casa Generalizia dei Passionisti,

Roma.

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Report to RENATE, by Anne Kelleher, RENATE Communications Person.

People on the move; who are we and whose are we?

Migration is personal. People are at the heart of this movement. Issues of migration, immigration, human trafficking, refugees, asylum seekers, are not new. These have been part of humankind down through the ages. Abraham left his country in search of new lands; Joseph was sold into slavery by his own people; Moses was sent to live in a foreign land, Ruth and Naomi, Mary and Joseph were migrants.

The phenomenon of the 21st Century is the movement of peoples, whether by choice or otherwise. It is an extraordinary humanitarian emergency, where we are confronted with extraordinary challenges in trying to look for an adequate response. If we accept that migration is the 'new normal,' then as Religious, we must ask ourselves " what is the Spirit asking us to do?"

James Keenan, SJ, defines mercy as " ...the willingness to enter into the chaos of another." Sometimes though, the willingness is not enough. We also need to see concrete action. At this conference, the Religious present stated they have been re-energised, in discovering there is a way of entering into the chaos of another's life and in so doing, they can try to make a difference in the lives of those in need. There is no point in trying to pretend migrants don't exist, we need to accept and welcome them as our brother and sisters. There is a danger of 'normalising' the tragedies unfolding through migration, exploitation, human trafficking. There is also the danger that our own migrant status conditions us to treat migrants as different

In reflecting over the past couple of days, one word kept recurring, 'Fear.' Fear, as expressed by both the migrants who addressed us; fear of people for their futures; fear for one's life; fear for one's livelihood.



Ms. Cecile Kyenge, Italian Minister for Integration and member of the European Parliament addressed the Conference, from her own personal experiences as a refugee, from the perspective of one whose dream has been realised. She found her voice and feels that she now can be 'a voice for the voiceless,' in her political role.

Ms. Kyenge emphasised the importance of reaching out to migrants, from a human level and that despite the complexities of trying to help and/or relate to migrants, it is essential that we reach out and open our doors, hearts and minds to our fellow human beings.

Ms. Kyenge deplored the absence of structured assistance to support migrants not only to survive but to thrive and realise their own dreams. She spoke of the stigma attached to the term 'migrant' and of its destructive connotations for those who are vulnerable. Above all, she urged us to make a real effort to participate in de-stigmatising migrants; to spread the good news that migrants can be a hugely positive presence in a country. She stressed the importance of making efforts to diffuse fears

and anxieties and to change attitudes, as very often, people's attitudes and actions arise out of fear and ignorance.

Mr. Federico Soda, (IOM) shared statistical data which helped give perspective to the refugee and migrant crisis. He maintained that the numbers in themselves do not create chaos, but instead, it is the absence of co-ordinated efforts and willingness to respond adequately and generously that has created chaos for both the migrants and the countries through which they travel. An over-emphasis on commodification rather than human consideration has helped certain countries turn a blind eye to people in need. He believes that Europe can anticipate another 20-30 years of continuous migration from West Africa and the Horn of Africa, therefore we need to have a variety of different approaches and solutions to cater for people migrating for various reasons. We would do best to accept that migration provides us with an opportunity to assimilate youth and their skills, thereby helping to ensure solidarity in Europe.

Ms. Anna Pozzi, Press reporter with *Mondo e Missioni*, spoke about the power of the media to portray a negative image of migrants, thereby conditioning people to be hostile towards them. While she spoke in particular about the issue of human trafficking and the perils for women and children on the migrant routes, her main focus was in improving the way journalists portrayed migrants and avoid the use of inflammatory language in their reporting. It was interesting to note that of all the migrants settling in Italy in the past year, 4% were Muslim. Yet it is widely believed that the percentage is much higher, often as a result of the media's portrayal of migrants. Ms. Pozzi is hopeful that journalists will specialise in this area of reporting on migrants and do so in a truthful manner. She concluded her remarks by stating that Religious have, as yet, not found their voice sufficiently in Italy.

Fr. Camillo Ripamonti, SJ, (Centro Astalli, Roma) introduced us to Luis, who spoke of his experiences as a migrant from Somalia. Although living in Italy for the past eight years, Luis still has not gained status and remains dependent upon the charity of the religious. It was heart-breaking to hear him tell of his family circumstances and his own despair at his ongoing situation.

Sr. Eugenia Bonetti (USMI) spoke about the need for collaboration and networking amongst the Religious and asked the question "what, if any, relationship building processes are in place?" She emphasised that the current reality provides an opportunity for Religious communities to give leadership within local communities by way of example in welcoming migrants. Sr. Eugenia introduced us to a young woman named Blessing, who managed to break the chains of human trafficking, with the help of the police and the Religious. Her story was one of hope and possibility, despite adversity and breaches of trust.



Fr. Oliviero Forti (Caritas Italia) posed the challenge, "Do we really know what is happening in the Mediterranean?" as he considered it is important to make an informed response. People may not be selective as to the type of migrant they wish to help, e.g. Christian vs. Muslim.. He emphasised the multi-dimensional considerations such as legal, social, cultural, economic and political.

Fr. Oliviero stated that it was shameful that of all the European Union member states, only four were making a genuine response and raised concerns for the absence of proactive responses from the remaining EU member states. He asked “where is the Church in each of these non-active states?” He also raised the possibility that the Church’s voice has not been sufficiently loud enough in Hungary. He repeatedly asked “What more can we do, in trying to apply the true spirit of solidarity?”



Sr. Patricia Murray, IBVM, (UISG),

provided a history of congregational support to migrants. In posing the rhetorical question about what the women Religious can do to respond to the situation in Lampedusa, she stressed the importance of practical, multi-layered responses to the challenges of migration. Sr. Pat spoke about the need to be a Church of encounter and to be a prophetic sign of presence. She shared the UISG efforts to help at Lampedusa

and how sisters are now seen as a presence and a collaborative focal point for all at local level. She spoke of a new theology emerging, that of the spirituality of living on the frontier.

Sr. Pat outlined a number of challenges, beginning with the importance of building community. Especially the practice of inter-cultural living, so as to better understand one another. A challenge for the future will be having the language capacities to be a bridge for migrants in their host countries. She referred to the challenge of building collaborative structures so as to enable migrants to integrate into communities. Additionally, the challenge was raised regarding endeavouring to journey together as companions. The question was posed as to how we can move forward with the migrants, learning from one another?

Finally, Sr. Pat cautioned about the need to take the time to build capacity amongst ourselves, in order to better accompany as we build bridges, not walls or barbed wire fences.

Sr. Monique Tarabeh, a Syrian sister of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, spoke about life on the ground in both the Lebanon and Syria. Currently, one third of the population in Lebanon are now refugees and of the 21 million in Syria, 50% are now refugees, 10 million of whom are displaced within the country. The war in Syria is now in its sixth year and has destroyed childhoods, livelihoods and school life. It has created a lost generation, for whom war and conflict has become the norm. In speaking about the five sisters and the 250 volunteers who assist them ministering both Christians and Muslims in Syria, it was chilling to hear of the brutality of the war in the cities of Damascus and Homs, where young children are receiving trauma therapy and women victims are struggling to cope with the aftermath of ISIS attacks. She called upon all present to raise their voices and call a halt to the war.

Statements of fidelity and solidarity.

Accept the fact that we are no longer in "Emergency mode." Migration is going to be a long-term activity.

Accept the fact that human trafficking is embedded in the migrant issue, not apart from it.

It is striking that there are so many single youth, travelling alone on the migrant routes.

The complexity of migration demands a comprehensive understanding, if we are to respond effectively and with relevance.

We need to draw upon a broad skills-base, pay for expertise and support if necessary. Goodwill is no longer sufficient.

Essential to target the 'root causes' behind such migration.

Need to recognise there are two distinct streams of migration; (1) From the Horn of Africa & West Africa and (2), from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan etc. While migrants from (1) above are unlikely to have a country to return to, it is likely that migrants from (2) will eventually have countries to return to, however, in many, years to come.

Acknowledge that responding to this crisis is going to disturb our 'comfort zones.'

This is a favourable time for congregational life, as we are open to possibilities and not 'builders of walls.'

Acknowledge the value of sharing information and experiences.

Importance of recognising our limitations/prejudices and the value of reaching out to one another in our efforts to effectively address the Migrant crisis.

Need to consider the question, "what can migrants do for us?" instead of "what can we do for them?"

Terrible to see countries being selective about offering assistance, i.e. wanting only to assist Christians as opposed to Muslims.

The current migrant situation calls for an **intellectual** conversion...

We have to figure out a way to experience the same 'conversion' as the migrants, so we look at the migrants as an image of ourselves.

Critical to amplify the voice of the migrants.

We are also called to an **institutional conversion. We have to re-identify/re-imagine ourselves.** Our congregations comprise migrant peoples. Are we no longer mobile?

Focus on eliminating the people traffickers/smugglers.

How do we move towards solidarity and integration?

Essential to hold governments accountable. It's unrealistic to decant the whole of Nigeria into Italy in order to care for its citizens...

Acknowledge the power of fear and how to move from fear towards solidarity and integration?

We need to **raise our voices and be heard.**

We need to network & collaborate.

We need to deploy our skills in order to effectively help the migrants.

We need to find new ways of governance and keep the doors open to new realities.

Acknowledge the constancy of the Religious in the journeys through time.

How do our institutions become interconnected in response to the current realities?

Apply the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, to inform our work as we collaborate together.

Be the 'voice for the voiceless.'

Stress the importance of self-belief. Educate the youth so that they do not abandon their own countries. Encourage belief in possibility within their own countries.

Smarten up/ be more strategic about the concept of the 'Market Economy,' as Religious, we are not well versed in the economy of greed.

"If the blanket does not warm us, then it's time for a change!" Time to change our mindset and actions in order to achieve better our goals and respond to our founding charisms.

Find the courage to move from an 'I' society to a 'we' society.

Have the courage to really live the Gospel.

Don't underestimate the impact of the recent negative press about the Religious, which caused us to lower our heads and be discouraged. We must not be defined by the actions of a limited number, which has seen us revert backwards, in fear.

Suggestions as to practical actions we can undertake:

Practical activities range from the provision of language classes; assistance with documentation completion; provision of accommodation; mapping exercises to determine the extent of needs and current provision in various countries where congregations are located.

Importance of dialogue and communication with one another.

Prepare local community houses which have spare capacity, to accommodate migrants (both family groups and /or individuals).

Importance of work at 'grass roots' level, in conjunction with others.

Respond according to the specific needs, i.e. recognise that the needs of Vietnamese migrants may be entirely different from the needs of an Eastern European or North African.

Importance of lobbying and advocacy.

Honour the capacity to support both the indigenous homeless while at the same time, attend to the needs of the migrants.

Critical importance of education- to inform and empower future generations.

In the end, it is all about building relationships, encouraging inclusion, being sensitive towards dialogue with others and acceptance of one another as citizens on this earth. It was agreed that this is the challenge for Christians, to give witness in each situation to the commandment of Jesus to love, with open hearts and open minds.

Ultimately, collaboration is key. Together we can achieve infinitely much more together than if we remain on our own.

Conclusion.

Fr. Gabriele Bertoglio, Pontifical Counsel for Pastoral Care of Migrants saw this conference as being of such significance that he remained at the conference throughout. He shared the view that the Conference had been very rich and fruitful and has generated new possibilities for the Religious and their ministries. He spoke of the extraordinary temptation of the Religious to be self-sufficient, but not to give in to that danger. He encouraged the Religious instead, to look beyond their own limitations and structures and to link up with one another and with other Church organisations in order to pursue the mission.

He advised that the Laity are the greatest resource which the Church is only now beginning to appreciate and that the Laity are only too willing to make a fuller contribution, in response to their Baptismal calling.

It was agreed that the conference proceedings would be written up and circulated to the participants in due course. UN representatives at the Conference would also feed into their respective organisations at the UN, with a view to impacting change at Official level.

The conference offered the participants the opportunity to share experiences and perspectives, network and build relationships. It has been a step towards creating an international network of solidarity, where we can be representatives of the Church, bearers of hope, take action against the infringements of human rights and offer welcome and solace to those displaced for whatever reason. It is our obligation and duty to make a Gospel response.

End.

Anne Kelleher, RENATE Communications Person.

THE RELIGIOUS & MIGRATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

PERSPECTIVES, RESPONSE & CHALLENGES

This workshop is aimed at bringing men and women religious together to share their experiences in the common responsibility towards the many migrants and refugees and to listen to those with deeper knowledge of the situation to enable them harness their efforts so that their response may be more effective and efficient.

SPEAKERS

- ✓ Voices: Trafficked women, Migrants & Refugees
- ✓ IOM: International Organization on Migration
- ✓ ICMC: International Catholic Migration Commission
- ✓ UNHCR: United Nations High Commission on Refugees
- ✓ Italian Government/EU: Migration/Refugee Department
- ✓ Caritas Internationalis
- ✓ Jesuits Refugee Center
- ✓ UISG: United International Superior Generals
- ✓ Journalists working with Migrants/Refugees
- ✓ Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace

TOPICS:

- ✓ Battle of values between fear and solidarity: Understanding Migration dynamics and the urgency of the current situation
- ✓ Stay with us: Practical responses to the Migrants/refugees
- ✓ Thinking global and acting local: strategies for effective response

AUDIENCE:

Religious men and women in Europe

VENUE: Casa Generalizia dei Passionisti Roma

DATE: February 22-24, 2016

Registration is on first come first serve

REGISTER ONLINE

www.eventbrite.com/e/the-religious-and-migration-in-the-21st-century-registration-20025297203

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