



CHRISTIANITY AND IMMIGRATION: CHRISTIANITY VERSUS THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

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A sort of shortcut, or short-circuit, has pervaded public opinion for many years, especially the Christian opinion, between the "Christian message" and "welcoming migrants." As if welcoming migrants summed up the demands and urgency of today's Christian message. As if "being a Christian today" found its touchstone in the welcome, if not unconditional, at least as broad as possible, of migrants. I would like to question the merits of this perspective.

I will first make a few very quick comments on migration. The dominant opinion, that which governs the rulers, maintains that it is fundamentally, if not exclusively, a moral problem, that the reception of migrants is a categorical imperative, perhaps tempered by the limited possibilities of the "host" countries. According to this view, we know what is good work, or a good deed; and the debate can legitimately only be about the appreciation of the circumstances. Yet this emphatically moral perspective rests on a political assumption that is rarely questioned, namely that migration is the major phenomenon of the times, the most significant phenomenon, and against which all others should be considered. This is the argument behind the Marrakesh Pact.

Moral Evidence Or Political Postulate?

However, migrants constitute a small percentage of the world's population, which continues to live mainly in constituted states. Whatever the specific needs and wishes of migrants, no substantial reason has yet been given to subordinate them in principle to the needs and wishes of non-migrant populations, who are not necessarily less needy. By urging states to do everything in their power to facilitate migratory movements, we immediately deprive political bodies of this essential part of their legitimacy, which consists in freely determining the conditions of access to their territory and to their citizenship. Even urging them to monitor how their citizens talk about migration arrogates the right to regulate public conversation in every country in the world. Thus, in the name of a moral evidence, which is only an arbitrary political postulate, we weaken the legitimacy and therefore the stability of the constituted states, in particular of those which are most sensitive to this argument, namely, the democratic countries, which now host a large number of migrants, and who are by far the most active when it comes to bringing them assistance.

Our democracies provide a life of peace, freedom and even conviviality, which remains enviable for large populations, whose social condition, education, religion, opinions and lifestyles are extremely varied. This associative capacity, the fruit of great efforts over a long history, is not unlimited. No one

knows how far a body politic can accept growing heterogeneity without breaking up. It is not only a question of "preserving" oneself, of defending what is one's own, however legitimate this concern may be—it is a question of preserving and, if possible, improving the conditions of "the good life," primarily from a common education.

Primacy Of Citizenship

Migrants themselves are no exception to this primacy of citizenship. They were active citizens of the country they left. They most often retain the rights of citizenship or nationality. They received a more or less complete education there, a human formation; in short, a form of life. It is therefore a very superficial view to look at migration exclusively from a humanitarian perspective, and migrants simply as "alike." Undoubtedly, migrants are our fellow human beings and we are required, if they are in danger, to come to their aid according to our means. But they are also citizens who have been instilled with social or religious rules, which can sometimes be directly contrary to our principles of justice. The duty to help here and now the migrant who is in danger in no way includes a duty to facilitate his migration, let alone that of making him a fellow citizen. All this depends on very varied considerations and ultimately on a judgment that is not moral but political; or rather an ethical judgment in the old sense of the term, that is to say a prudential judgment in which the common good of the community of citizens is the main, although not exclusive, criterion.

What "Christian Message?"

I come to the second point. What exactly do we mean, or what do we mean seriously, when we speak of the "Christian message?" The answer is all the more difficult because over the course of a long history, the Christian proposal has found very diverse expressions, depending on the evolutions of the Church—of those of the world and of the interactions of the Church and the world. In particular, it appears that the modalities of the Christian proposal are very different depending on whether the Church is in a position of command or of authority, as she was during much of European history; or in a position of marginality or subordination, as she is today. I'll proceed from there.

We constantly meet with traces, remnants or signs of the once central and commanding position of the Church. But, if we look at things as they are, it appears that the Church is increasingly rejected and lies at the margins of European society, including French society. The ecclesial institution, and Catholics in general, have long become accustomed to this diminished condition; but at the cost of increasing

difficulty in carrying out the Christian proposal. How can the breadth and gravity of her appeal to humanity be heard without departing from the modesty to which her present situation obliges her? This proposal is addressed to all men, it concerns the whole of man, and the mission of Christians is to carry this call.

However, if the Church, through her liturgy and her sacraments, continues to fulfill this mission in the direction of her active members, she no longer really knows in what terms to formulate it in the public space. Indeed, the sovereign state has gradually imposed its point of view on all participants in common life, including the Church. From the point of view of the state, the Christian faith is one opinion among others, the freedom of which it guarantees, but which does not deserve any special consideration, as it hastens to let her know as soon as she intervenes in the public space. However, even though the Church today does not demand any special consideration, she cannot renounce her *raison d'être*. How to address humanity, and first of all the members of the civic body, when an increasingly rigorous interpretation of secularism leads the state to exercise increasingly precarious surveillance over any public expression that can be linked to religion?

It is therefore a great temptation in the Church to seek the ear of the public and to preserve its audience, by linking the proclamation, which is specific to her, to the prevailing opinion today, by confusing the Christian proclamation with this "religion of humanity," which envelops Europe and the Americas, reducing charity to that "sentiment of similarity," in which Tocqueville already saw the deepest and most powerful psychic spring of modern democracy. It's a temptation, because like all temptations, it's an ease, and it's a lie. Indeed, the religion of humanity proclaims a human family, virtually united and healed. It invites us to perceive, under the still virulent separations, a humanity in which the similarity of men under their differences would be immediately visible and perceptible. One understands the attraction of a prospect that promises the unification of humanity through the contagion of pleasant feeling. We must also point out the cost. Once rooted, this point of view implies a relaxation of all our ambitions; a renunciation in principle of all our common actions, since there can be no ambition or common action without an effort to distinguish oneself from those who do not share this ambition, or have no part in this common action. A humanity which claims to unite by the contagion of the feeling of the similar, is a humanity which has given up acting, since, as soon as we act, as Rousseau explains, we must "take into account the differences that we find in the continual use we have to make of each other."

The Religion Of Humanity

In the eyes of the Christian, in particular, the religion of humanity is superficial because it does not understand the depth of what separates men and where their enmity is rooted: how to imagine that men will find the healing of their divisions in that feeling of sympathy which, reduced to itself, has little strength and constancy? Moreover, it is because the human capacity for sympathy is naturally limited that compassion is prolonged, spreads and is distorted in political projects, which introduce new divisions by seeking new enemies. How can we fail to see the political and ideological passion behind the project of a world "without borders," which presents itself as the necessary conclusion of the awareness of human similarity?

The humanitarian proposal is difficult to refuse because it postulates that it is enough for everyone to be aware of the evidence of human resemblance to enter into justice. The Christian proposal is difficult to accept because it affirms that all human beings are prisoners of an injustice from which they cannot escape by their own strength, and that in order to come out of it they must accept the mediation of Christ both man and God, mediation of which the Church in turn is the mediator. It is indeed a lot of mediation— when the religion of humanity offers the immediate feeling of human likeness; but it opens up an incomparably more instructive and demanding path of improvement, since its end is God himself, of whom every human being is the image.

It would be unfair to underestimate the virtues and the happy effects of humanitarian compassion. In fact, the gestures of charity are in part the same as those of compassion. But in the face of the fabulous powers bestowed on compassion, in the face of precisely this religion of compassion which has established its authority among us, it is important to underline its limits. Christians would lose the sense and intention of their faith if they could no longer distinguish between compassion and charity.

Fascination With The "Migrant"

Thus, after sketching a political perspective on migration, I have just emphasized the specificity of the Christian message. The two approaches, by various paths, aim to deliver us from a vertigo that sweeps away many of us, Christians or not. From a giddiness to a fascination, the fascination of the "migrant," a figure which sums up humanity because he is the loss of the human as Marx said more or less of the proletarian, a Christ-like figure who tends to substitute for Christ as the object of the intention if not of the faith of Christians. However, the attraction, the bewitchment by the figure of the migrant in one part of public opinion inevitably finds its counterpart in another part of public opinion; in the form of a more or less vehement rejection of migrants, so that the reception or refusal of migrants tends to constitute

in our countries the most powerful motive for political and moral divisions. I have tried to suggest that migration does not force us to change the character of our political system, or the meaning and standards of the Christian religion. Yet, if migration does not fundamentally change the political condition of men, it exerts pressure on our countries which, in fact, deeply affects both our political system and, if I may say so, our religious regime. This pressure is both the cause and the effect of the surprisingly rapid progress of this "religion of humanity" which is profoundly transforming the conditions of our common life.

This new political religion has delegitimized our representative republic by imposing the idea that there is something radically unjust in a community of citizens who govern themselves, because in doing so they separate themselves from the rest of men, and at the same time exclude all those who are not part of it. As democratic as it wants to be, our community of citizens is considered radically unfair since the rights it grants to its members are not granted to all the men who ask for or claim them. The only fair rule is that which applies to men in general. It is according to the same logic that the religion of humanity has tended to delegitimize the Christian religion which, a community sharing objects of faith, criteria of judgment and a form of life which are specific to it, separates itself from the rest of humanity. In fact, any community of action or education, in short just about all that humanity has been able to produce, is delegitimized by the religion of humanity which only wants to see similar people, where men have created great different things.

The difficulty, one is tempted to say, the perversity of our situation, is concentrated in the relationship between migration and the religion of humanity. This commands us to open up to migrants, without asking for anything in return—and certainly not to open up to our form of life. Yet are we not "the others" for them? In truth, there is no question here of equality or human resemblance. The meeting to which we are invited is that of a presumed innocent and a presumed culprit; it is ordered by a moral inequality of principle. It is that the religion of mankind was not produced by united mankind, but by old Christendom tired of itself, or in revolt against itself. Humanitarianism is not only a weakening of Christianity. Rather, there is, at the root of the religion of humanity, which has taken possession of Europe, an enmity and resentment, specifically directed against the Christian religion. This state of affairs concerns non-Christians as well as Christians if not in the same way; since, while Christianity seems to be withdrawing from European life, another religion has taken hold of consciences to deprive Europeans of any right to govern themselves and to preserve a form of life of their own. While Europe persists in erasing the last traces of Christendom, nothing can stop it from disappearing into a humanity without form or vocation.

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The [featured image](#) shows, "De bruiloft te Kana (Marriage at Cana)," by Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, painted 1530-1532.

