

Teaching About Human Mobility: How to Respond to Pope Francis' Request to Universities and NGOs

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In this article, the author reflects on Pope Francis' invitation to Catholic universities to respond to the situation of today's migrants and refugees by doing research on the phenomenon, teaching and becoming engaged in social promotion. After briefly surveying Catholic Social Thought and providing some statistics on human mobility, the article encourages teachers and lecturers (especially in Theology, Philosophy and the Social Sciences) to include this topic in their teaching, and reflects on what to teach and how to teach about human mobility by proposing some elements of a teaching "ethos" from personal experience.

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Introduction

On Saturday, 4th November 2017, Pope Francis met representatives of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU), several universities and NGOs in a private audience, at the conclusion of an International Conference entitled "Migrants and Refugees in a Globalized World: Responsibility and Responses of Universities." Pope Francis has repeatedly appealed to Catholic institutions and Catholic voices in civil society to be proactive in promoting the rights and welfare of migrants and refugees and in changing the negative narrative around human mobility, especially in developed countries. Listening to this

appeal, Catholic Universities have started to reflect on what their contribution could be, given their competence and their resources.

During the audience, and building on the suggestions coming from Baggio and Czerny, Pope Francis requested a contribution from Catholic Universities in three areas that are within their competence: research, teaching, and social promotion. As regards *research*, he asked universities to "harmonize scientific with theological research" and to engage in studies (even long-term) that seek to understand the remote causes of forced migration, with the aim of identifying practical solutions. Furthermore, he invited universities to focus on "the reactions - negative in principle, at times even discriminatory and xenophobic - that the arrival of migrants is generating in countries of ancient Christian Tradition," asking Catholic universities to take such reactions into account "in order to recommend programmes for educating consciences."¹ He also invited such universities to "deepen theological reflection on migration as a sign of the times."² As regards *social promotion*, he suggested that Catholic Universities be active in the process that will hopefully lead to the adoption of two Global Compacts, one on migrants and the other on refugees, in the second half of 2018, by the international community: Baggio and Czerny's dicastery have already produced a list of 20 "action points" that could inspire advocacy in this area, based on solid research and the experience of Catholic NGOs in the field of human mobility.³

Finally, as regards *teaching*, (besides facilitating the recognition of qualifications), Pope Francis invited universities to invest both in

¹ Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU)," Website of the Holy See, 4 November 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/november/documents/papa-francesco_20171104_federazione-universita-cattoliche.html.

² Idem.

³ Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development of the Holy See, "Towards the Global Compacts on Migrants and on Refugees 2018" (Palazzo San Callisto, Vatican City: Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development of the Holy See, 2017), www.migrants-refugees.va.

educating refugees and migrants (through distance learning and study grants), and in educating “their own students - some of whom will become political leaders, entrepreneurs and creators of culture - to understand the migratory phenomenon, in a perspective of justice, global co-responsibility and communion in cultural diversity.”⁴

In what follows (sections 2-4), I will deal mainly about my experience in this latter kind of education, which also entails “harmonizing scientific with theological research” as Pope Francis suggests in the area of research. I will however start by arguing briefly why teaching students about human mobility today is a must in all centres of tertiary education, including (and maybe especially so) in seminaries and Pontifical Universities (section 1).

1. The Need to Educate our Students Scientifically and Theologically about Human Mobility

1.1 An Urgent Task for Social Science: *Engaging Catholic Social Thought on Human Mobility*

I teach at a Pontifical University in Rome. Most of my students will probably not become “political leaders, entrepreneurs and creators of culture,” but rather religious leaders. If Catholic Social Thought (CST) has been deemed the Church’s “best kept secret,” then CST on migration is much less known, even among the clergy living in areas with considerable emigration, transit migration and new arrivals, and among the various Catholic faithful and movements that are active in the fields of reception, integration and organization of diasporas. Certainly, it is an urgent task for theological ethics to engage Catholic Social Thought on Human Mobility, but other disciplines - and especially social science scholars in Catholic universities - should also engage this body of thought.

Pope Francis invites us to help our students “to understand the migratory phenomenon, in a perspective of justice, global co-responsibility and communion in cultural diversity.” Most of these documents seek to do all of this, speaking to a wide audience and using an ecclesiastical style of writing. Given that we need to teach about a

rapidly-changing phenomenon in a particular cultural and political context, and that ecclesiastical writing rarely engages directly and rigorously with social science or natural science data,⁵ we cannot simply present these documents to our students without providing a whole range of other materials. Yet, the ethical principles and basic rights contained in these documents have a lasting quality: they help to orient our discernment on local laws and policies (as active citizens who participate in policymaking via civil society), on the advocacy we could engage in, on the research that we need to pursue in our own cultural, political and historic situations. CST makes several rights claims on behalf of migrants and refugees, and on behalf of sending and receiving communities. Such claims should be understood as elements integrated in a system that makes sense as a whole (rather than cherry-picked and taken individually). Furthermore, they should not be treated as absolutes but as *prima facie* valid claims often in conflict or tension with other claims, and hence they need to be prudentially adjudicated with the help of a series of principles.

Among the rights discussed in the above mentioned documents, the following are worth noting: the universal right to a *nationality*, the right of refugees to *asylum* (and to non-refoulement), the right to *migrate* (including the right to enter and settle in a foreign country, in certain cases), the right to *adequate employment and to basic human freedoms in one’s own country* (often called “the right not to migrate” in recent texts, a slogan which however risks being hijacked by xenophobes), the right to be helped to integrate in a new country, the *right to receive equal pay for equal work*, the right (of host communities and migrants) to *live in a cohesive and well-ordered society*, the right to *limit “brain drain” and capital flight*, and the right to *sovereignty* (well-understood, and limited by ethical imperatives). Among the important principles that we need to consider in adjudication among such rights, in practice, CST speaks of the following: *the universal destination of created goods, solidarity,*

⁵ René M. Micallef, “Laudatosi’ e la sua metodologia: un critico ascolto delle scienze empiriche?,” in *Laudatosi’. Linee di lettura interdisciplinari per la cura della casa comune*, ed. Humberto Miguel Yáñez (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2017), 13–48.

⁴ Pope Francis, “Pope Francis’ Address to IFCU.”

subsidiarity, the priority of labour over capital, the preferential option for the poor, the respect for legality dependent on the moral acceptability of civil laws, and the promotion of healthy “catholic” or “cosmopolitan” ways of being patriotic.

All of this needs to be integrated via civic virtues, that is, good habits and attitudes that shape our behaviour in the public sphere. In his message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (14 January 2018), Pope Francis comments on four verbs: to *welcome*, to *protect*, to *promote*, and to *integrate*. The corresponding civic virtues are: hospitality, sheltering, advocacy and fraternity (or “kinship-building,” or “convivencia”). Training students in such virtues, through a series of communal and social practices, is a key part of what Catholic universities should be about.

Why is it urgent that social sciences, and not only moral theology (and persons involved in pastoral work), engage in a dialogue with this body of thinking? Certainly, today’s migrants and refugees are not in the exact same situations as those of the 1950s and 1960s when most of these rights claims and principles were developed or applied to the phenomenon of human mobility. Some elements may need to be refined or updated through critical input from scientific studies and people working in the field. On the other hand, social science research is never completely “neutral”: when we design questionnaires, interpret quantitative research and interviews, or decide what issues to delve into, we have certain interests and priorities and worldviews in our mind that somewhat shape our decisions. CST on migration can provide an adequate and justifiable worldview and a series of priorities to orient social-scientific research and philosophical reflection on such issues.

1.2 An Urgent Task for Theological Ethics:

Engaging Social Science Data on Human Mobility

Most people in developed countries think that we are in the midst of an unprecedented migration and refugee crisis. To some extent, this perception is unwarranted: for over half a century, the number of migrants has remained at roughly 3% of the world’s population.⁶

⁶ International Organization for Migration, “Global Migration Trends Factsheet,” OM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, 2015, <http://>

At the same time, the global population rose (from 3 to 7.6 billion).⁷ The number of refugees actually fell between 1990 and 2010 (from 18.5 to 16.3 million), though more recently it has increased (to 22.5 million in 2017)⁸ mainly because of the war in Syria. Some experts, such as Stéphane Jacquemet (the UNHCR Regional Representative for Southern Europe), provocatively suggest that the Western World does not have a refugee or a migrant crisis, but rather an “identity crisis” in the face of recent migrant arrivals.⁹ During the Syrian crisis, small and relatively poorer countries like Uganda or Lebanon have received more asylum seekers than the whole of Europe and have managed to cope relatively well, in spite of the massive flows.

In these last 30 years or so, there has been an impressive development in migration studies that has touched many social science disciplines. The data and reflection produced help us to recognize that mass human mobility is a structural part of today’s world, and not simply a temporary crisis, while at the same time debunking a whole series of “migration and refugee myths.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, of the 244 million people on the move in 2015, many did not simply travel freely, moved by a desire to see the world or work in a different culture.¹¹ To be sure, the people

⁷ Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, “World Population Prospects 2017,” Population Division, 2017, <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>.

⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Figures at a Glance,” UNHCR, 19 June 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

⁹ I refer here to Jacquemet’s comments in his keynote speech delivered on the 1st November 2017 at the above mentioned international conference “Migrants and Refugees in a Globalized World: Responsibility and Responses of Universities,” held at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

¹⁰ Catherine Wihtol de Wenden and Madeleine Benoît-Guyod, *Atlas des migrations: Un équilibre mondial à inventer*, 4th edition (Paris: Autrement, 2016); Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas, and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration, Fifth Edition: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 5th ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2013); Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield, *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹¹ International Organization for Migration, “Global Migration Trends Factsheet.”

who suffer most in this process are the forcibly displaced (65.6 million in 2017), which include refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people. However, many migrants are considered in the data as travelling mainly for “economic reasons” (though this often includes environmentally-displaced persons who lose their livelihoods due to climate change, environmental degradation and natural disasters, and hence have very urgent “economic reasons” to move, in order to survive). Some of these “economic migrants” risk their lives in harrowing journeys trying to reach a first-world economy that promises a well-paying job; many leave their families and suffer a culture shock only to find themselves working abroad in very harsh conditions.

All of this is related to the huge wealth disparities in our world, where 0.7% of the human population owns 45.9% of the wealth of the world, while 70.1% of the human population owns 2.7% of the wealth of the world.¹² In a globalized world where money, products and services move freely, but not human beings, borders and sovereignty (while politically and legally necessary) have become useful tools to keep the poor out of those places where global wealth is hoarded and concentrated. Mass human mobility, as we know it today, is a reaction to this: it allows some skills transfers and redistributes money to poorer families and regions via remittances (which reached \$ 601 billion in 2016, more than three times the size of development aid¹³). Yet, as a counter reaction, wealthy countries have made it harder and harder for poor people to enter their territory legally, militarized their borders, and taken draconian measures to keep migrants out. The result is a huge loss of human life due to dangerous sea and desert crossings, and due to the “way of doing business” of smugglers and traffickers: between the 1st January and the time of writing of this paper on the 13th November 2017, 5014 migrant fatalities were recorded worldwide.¹⁴

¹² Credit Suisse Research Institute, “Global Wealth Report 2017” (Zurich: Credit Suisse, November 2017), 21, <http://publications.credit-suisse.com/index.cfm/publikationen-shop/research-institute/global-wealth-report-2017-en/>.

¹³ World Bank, “Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016,” World Bank, 2016, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/research/brief/migration-and-remittances>.

¹⁴ International Organization for Migration, “Missing Migrants Project,” Missing Migrants, 13 November 2017, <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>.

Since the 11th September 2001 attacks, migrants and refugees are associated, in the minds of many people, with “crime.” People conflate irregular entry (criminalized by some governments), acts of global terrorism linked to religious fundamentalism (and hence to “foreigners,” in many countries), and antisocial behaviours in some refugee parents suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and construe what has been called a “crimmigration crisis,” one of the most dangerous of the many myths spread by xenophobes in our world.¹⁵ Furthermore, the global recession, unemployment and the erosion of wages and benefits in the first world have also created anger and frustration among the working classes, and migrants and refugees are often easy scapegoats. The idea that “migrants are taking our jobs” - based on the intuitive but erroneous notion that an economy has only a fixed number of jobs which can be filled either by natives or by migrants - spreads easily, even in emerging economies, and can do incredible social, political and economic harm.

The major data produced in the fields of sociology, demography and economics need to be absorbed and digested not only by social science students at our universities, but by all university students who should be opinion leaders for today and tomorrow’s generations, helping people to unmask fake news and expose the myths spread by fearmongers and xenophobic politicians. Yet, it is also an urgent task for theological ethics to remain updated so as to better form consciences and accompany decisions. Catholic Social Thought, especially as applied and presented to the faithful in the documents of regional bishops’ conferences, needs to partner with scientifically-informed theologians and theologically-informed social scientists in order to remain receivable, topical and soundly rooted in reality, since, as Pope Francis often reminds us, “realities are more important than ideas.”¹⁶

2. My Experience in Teaching about Human Mobility

2.1 Teaching on Politically - Sensitive Issues in a Catholic University

In *Ex corde ecclesiae* (1990, n.13), St. John Paul II states that “the objective of a Catholic University is to assure in an institutional manner

¹⁵ Juliet Stumpf, “The Crimmigration Crisis: Immigrants, Crime, and Sovereign Power,” *American University Law Review* 56, no. 2 (December 2006): 367–419.

¹⁶ Cf., for instance, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 231ff.

a Christian presence in the university world confronting the great problems of society and culture.” He further notes that, “without in any way neglecting the acquisition of useful knowledge, a Catholic University is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth, [...] that fundamental value without which freedom, justice and human dignity are extinguished” (idem, n.4). Over the last decades, there has been several interesting articles published on the role of Catholic Universities in today’s world.¹⁷

Several recent sociological studies show how “facts” can backfire in this way.¹⁸ For example, Gaines *et al.*, analysed how opinions in the US concerning the Bush administration’s handling of the Iraq war evolved as real-world conditions changed, and concluded that “actual beliefs [...] become relevant for political judgments only when people interpret them. Interpretations provide opportunities for partisans to rationalize their existing opinions.”¹⁹ In their study, it was clear that “most respondents held similar, fairly accurate beliefs about facts. But interpretations varied across partisan groups in predictable ways. In turn, interpretations, not beliefs, drove opinions. Perversely, the better informed more effectively used interpretations to buttress their existing partisan views.”²⁰ Similar results were found in studies by Taber and

¹⁷ To give just one example, Fr Hervé Carrier, a Canadian Jesuit and sociologist, rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University from 1966 to 1978 and president of the International Federation of Catholic Universities from 1970 to 1980, wrote extensively on this topic. Cf. Hervé Carrier, “Les Responsabilités de l’Université Moderne,” *Gregorianum* 50, no. 3 (1969): 463–83; “How Will Catholic Universities Confront World Development?,” *Gregorianum* 52, no. 1 (1971): 5–25; “Pour Une Politique de La Recherche Dans l’Église: Rôle Des Universités Catholiques,” *Gregorianum* 53, no. 1 (1972): 5–44; “Les Universités Catholiques Face Au Pluralisme Culturel,” *Gregorianum* 58, no. 4 (1977): 607–40; “New Cultures: A Challenge to Universities,” *Gregorianum* 63, no. 3 (1982): 507–23.

¹⁸ Joe Keohane, “How Facts Backfire: Researchers Discover a Surprising Threat to Democracy: Our Brains,” *Boston Globe*, 11 July 2010, sec. Sunday.

¹⁹ “Same Facts, Different Interpretations: Partisan Motivation and Opinion on Iraq,” *The Journal of Politics* 69, no. 4 (1 November 2007): 957–74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4622608>.

²⁰ Idem.

Lodge and by Nyhan: strongly partisan views on hot issues not only remain unchallenged when *scientific data* is provided that should normally weaken the basis of their arguments; they also fail to react to *personal testimony* in ways deemed reasonable or rational by eternal observers.²¹

Nyhan *et al.* show that when politically informed Tea Party Republicans were provided with clear factual information trying to correct myths regarding the Affordable Care Act, they became *even more convinced* that such myths were true.²² Studies by Cobb and Kuklinski also point to the fact that many a time, arguments *against* policy change, even when poor or not supported by rigorous studies, often carry more weight, since “people tend to be both risk and loss averse [and thus,] con arguments, which accentuate the unpleasant consequences of a proposed policy [tend to] quickly and soundly resonate with the average citizen. Moreover, fear and anger, which con arguments presumably evoke, are among the strongest emotions [...], and serve as readily available sources of information when people evaluate an impending policy initiative.”²³

All of this has to be kept in mind when facing our students in a lecture hall, or organizing events which try to change public opinion and public attitudes regarding immigrants, and when proposing policy changes that alter the *status quo*. Interestingly, in many of these studies, people who are better read and have a higher level of education seem to be less ready to put aside their prejudices, meet the other, listen, and

²¹ Charles S. Taber and Milton Lodge, “Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (2006): 755–769, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00214.x>. Brendan Nyhan, “The Limited Effects of Testimony on Political Persuasion,” *Public Choice* 148, no. 3–4 (September 2011): 283–312, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bc.edu/10.1007/s11127-010-9655-0>.

²² Brendan Nyhan, Jason Reifler, and Peter A. Ubel, “The Hazards of Correcting Myths About Health Care Reform,” *Medical Care* 51, no. 2 (February 2013): 127–32, <https://doi.org/10.1097/MLR.0b013e318279486b>.

²³ Michael D. Cobb and James H. Kuklinski, “Changing Minds: Political Arguments and Political Persuasion,” *American Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 1 (1 January 1997): 114–15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111710>.

let their opinions be challenged and their hearts be changed. Are these the future leaders we are training in our universities?

2.2 Teaching on Politically -

Sensitive Issues in a Pontifical University

Pontifical Universities are, of course “Catholic” universities, but they stand in a category of their own. They are established by the Holy See and are directly under its authority; their structure is governed by the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* (1979, currently being updated) which also establishes the regulations for granting academic degrees in sacred faculties, among them Canon Law, Philosophy, Sacred Theology and Sacred Scripture. The Pontifical Gregorian University, successor of the Roman College (founded in 1551), is the archetypical “Pontifical University,” where most students - coming from all over the world - enrol to train for priesthood or to get an academic specialization so as to directly serve their diocese or their religious congregation. The university has 6 faculties, and several institutes and centres, but a good half of its students are enrolled in the Theology faculty, which is also the faculty to which I belong as a theological ethicist.

I teach two major courses at the Pontifical Gregorian University which have to do with human mobility. One course, bearing the title “The Ethics of Immigration Policymaking,” brings together data on the situation of migrants and refugees - especially those travelling to or settled in developed countries -, a reflection on the policymaking mechanisms regarding sovereignty and borders in such countries (which includes elements of political philosophy and international law), and a theological ethics framework blending rights, principles and virtues, and inspired by Catholic Social Thought, to guide voting, activism and policymaking. Another course, on “Using Scripture in Ethics: The Issue of the Stranger,” seeks to form students in using Scripture honestly, scientifically and responsibly when reflecting on thorny issues in moral theology, and brings together an exegetical toolbox, a reflection on hermeneutics and the analysis of a number of biblical texts which speak about the strangers and sojourners. In recent years, I have also taught a module on environmentally-displaced persons within a course on

Laudatosi’,²⁴ and a course about the ethics of peace and conflict, which includes a reflection on the plight of persons displaced by various kinds of violence and war.

I have to admit that my experience of teaching at university level is limited (this is my fifth year of teaching) and that I teach these courses in a particular environment: most of my students are priests or members of religious orders, and most are living in Italy but are not Italians. I teach these courses at masters’ level, in small classes, to students who choose these courses from a long list of possible courses, so in general I teach to a select and receptive audience. I have also organized events on various topics linked to human mobility; these attract a wider variety of participants and often prove to be a more challenging - and sometimes more stimulating - teaching experience.

In what follows, I would like to use what I have learnt from this admittedly limited experience, so to temper and to ground the rationale underpinning what I teach and how I teach it.

3. What to Teach

3.1 Working within the bounds of our institutions

Let us start with the question “what to teach?” To some extent *what we teach depends on the programmes and curricula which our deans and heads of departments fashion*, according to their view of what topics are relevant to the formation of students in a certain area of knowledge and what would make a coherent whole. Yet we often have enough freedom to propose new optional courses and seminars, or to suggest a rethink of the programmes, and when asked to teach certain classical courses we still have freedom to select the examples and case studies that we feel can introduce our students to certain topics.

When I arrived at the Pontifical Gregorian University, I was asked to teach a course on peace at the Faculty of Social Sciences, and a

²⁴ Carlotta Venturi and René M. Micallef, “Glisfollatiambientali allaluce di *Laudatosi*”, in *Laudatosi. Linee di lettura interdisciplinari per la cura della casa comune*, ed. Humberto Miguel Yáñez (Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2017), 193–221.

course on Christian Ethics and Politics at the Department of Moral Theology. I focused my “peace” course on contemporary conflicts, nationalism, genocide, transitional justice and terrorism, touching in many ways on the situation of migrants and refugees. The Politics and Christian Ethics course became my course on the Ethics of Immigration Policymaking. Later on, I proposed a course on “The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics,” which I felt was lacking in our programme. When I was asked to build this course, I decided to use the biblical texts concerning the stranger as a case study: half of the course is dedicated to reading exegetical analysis of biblical texts using methods from different schools while seeking to understand critically how exegetes use Scripture to make ethical claims, whether such claims make any sense to a moral theologian, and whether they can be used to guide policymaking in the 21st century.

Besides simply teaching courses, I soon got involved in organizing events for the general public. In my first year in Rome, I subtitled a documentary film in Spanish about *Las Patronas*, a group of women farmers in Mexico who have been providing food and shelter for weary migrants passing by their fields for more than 20 years, and I invited Norma Romero - one of the founders - over to share her experience.²⁵ Many other similar events followed, once I carved a niche for this kind of activity within the university.

3.2 Working within the Bounds of our Clients' Tastes

Whether we think that offering many choices to students to personalize their studies is a postmodern commodification²⁶ of education

²⁵ Alberto Najar, “Las Patronas que alimentan migrantes en México,” BBC Mundo - Noticias, 5 September 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/noticias/2012/09/120821_patronas_migracion_mexico_zetas_an.shtml.

²⁶ Rajani Naidoo and Ian Jamieson, “Knowledge in the Marketplace: The Global Commodification of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education,” in *Internationalizing Higher Education: Critical Explorations of Pedagogy and Policy*, ed. Peter Ninnes and Meeri Hellstén (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2005), 37–51; Liesl Orr, “Globalisation and Universities: Towards the ‘Market University’?,” *Social Dynamics* 23, no. 1 (1 January 1997): 42–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533959708458619>.

or a form of *curapersonalis*, we live in a university world where students have become clients in the marketplace of ideas. Thus, to some extent, in programmes where students get to choose a certain number of courses, *what we teach also depends on our students' interests and our ability to market our courses*. I have had the experience in the past of having prepared what seemed to me a stimulating new course, only to see it cancelled on the first week of October since there were too few students who chose it. I was disadvantaged at the time, since I was a newcomer and my name on a programme meant nothing, and both academic units I taught in had very few students: the numbers have picked up considerably since then. Yet, the experience forced me to try to understand what students at this university find attractive and how to describe and adapt what I wanted to teach to the tastes of my clients.

3.3 Working within the Bounds of our Discipline

Certainly, *what we teach also depends on our formation and expertise*. Yet, we can open up new areas of interest and research within our discipline, and also include other disciplines in what we teach, by adopting an interdisciplinary approach. Of course, there are limits to how much we can say on behalf of experts from other disciplines. Some time ago, a well-published sociologist of migration was invited to give a lecture to our students about the phenomenon of human mobility today. The audience expected her to present a sociological overview, and to stick to her discipline. To be sure, her 90-minute presentation did contain sociological data and summarised results from sociological studies, but the main thrust of her talk was a reflection on political philosophy and ethics, and more specifically: sovereignty, the principle of exclusion implicit in the concept of a modern nation-state, human rights in international law, our duties towards strangers from the viewpoint of a universalist ethics, and the importance of rule of law and consistent rule-following.

To some extent I was thrilled and stimulated to see that a social scientist could be aware of the lack of widespread ethical and philosophical reflection on these topics, in the context of our current debates on human mobility, to the point of being sucked into my fields of expertise. Surely, I did not fully agree with the ethical and philosophical

worldview underpinning her arguments and her conclusions. Furthermore, her approach made me doubt whether she was aware that there are other approaches to ethics and to political philosophy out there, relevant to her thinking, that she seemed not to have considered. Yet, it is flattering to see empirical scientists passionate about my world, which many still conceive a completely useless branch of the academia, populated with lofty ideals, wishful thinking and hair-splitting distinctions.

More importantly, however, this experience made me think about the fact that many lecturers end up teaching ethics implicitly or explicitly, depending on the way they study and present social and natural phenomena. This is a great opportunity for our universities, yet if done without a certain critical approach and a certain humility, it is also a big challenge, since it is hard to know if in our lecture halls certain values, rights and duties which are problematic from the viewpoint of Catholic Social Thought are being presented as though they were hard, factual social-scientific or biological truths.

4. How to Teach

4.1 Developing an Ethos

After touching on the “what,” let us now come to the “how.” I will bracket the purely pedagogical issues like learning outcomes, course design, whether to use Powerpoint or Prezi or audiovisual “learning objects,” and so on; several useful handbooks are available on these topics.²⁷ Besides being a migration scholar, looking at human mobility from an ethics viewpoint, I also teach fundamental moral theology, focusing on epistemology and methodology in ethics. This means I’m interested in the sources of moral reasoning and in the methods we use to do research, construct arguments and propose behaviours and policies, and in how to present all this to others.

²⁷ For example: Linda B. Nilson, *Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors*, 4th edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016); Wilbert McKeachie and Marilla Svinicki, *McKeachie’s Teaching Tips*, 14th edition (Australia/United States: Wadsworth Publishing, 2013); Barbara Gross Davis, *Tools for Teaching*, 2nd edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009); Susan A. Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Whatever our discipline and whatever we teach on a thorny subject like human mobility, I believe we should develop an *ethos*, which entails both a method and a series of best practices so as to respect what we value, as citizens, as intellectuals, as members of faith communities. In what follows, I will list and comment some of the values that guide my ethos when teaching about asylum-seeking and migration.

4.2 Talking from Experience

There is talking about one’s experiences and then there’s talking from experience. Much as I appreciate Paul Ricœur and the importance of imagination in will formation, I’m not very keen on talking about myself or telling stories in class: I believe young people today should be pushed to wrestle with concepts, since they are somewhat addicted to narratives. To be sure, narratives are useful to ingratiate an audience at the beginning and to provide food for thought. Yet, I feel I can communicate my experiences to my students in many ways, without necessarily having to say that I have done university studies in six different countries and four languages, that I’ve lived outside my country for 18 years, or that I’ve worked with migrant children in Spain, with Hispanic prisoners in the US, or with refugees in Uganda. Given that I immersed myself deeply into the cultures of the different countries where I have lived, or at least I like to think so, I believe that the passion with which I make my arguments in favour of the rights and duties of the many people I care about betrays my lived experience, and that my cosmopolitan perspective on things flows out in whatever I say and do, in the authors I choose, in the bibliographies I provide, in the cases I examine, and in the way I interact with students coming from different countries.

4.3 Listening

Listening, and asking students to listen, is a very important attitude. We should listen to migrants and refugees, but also to the host communities. We should listen with empathy, but also remain critical of stereotypical, scripted, black-on-white narratives that both xenophobic politicians and philoxenic NGOs often expect the “witnesses” on both sides of the debate to abide by, so as “not to complicate things and muddy the message.” Are the migrants really

the only people who have loud parties, leave rubbish around, have alcohol problems and react aggressively when spoken to in a certain way on certain subjects, or are these rather general problems found in most housing projects around the world? Was this neighbourhood really so different before they arrived? Is it really true that the integration process in Italy or in Malta or elsewhere is a total failure? Is it true that many migrants are not sure whether they can honestly apply for asylum or not?

Beyond listening and opening one's heart to the experience of other, I believe we should also empower people to speak. It is hard for traumatized migrants and refugees to trust anyone with something close to what really happened to them on the way. It took a Rwandan, who was a very close friend of mine, many years to even mention the genocide in a conversation with me, let alone tell me what he did to survive. When I was in Kampala, it was hard for a Ugandan sister (let alone a westerner like me) to understand why one of our students, a young boy who had escaped the fighting in Eastern DRC, suddenly decided to go back to the conflict zone to consult a witch doctor, feeling he was safer there than in Kampala where somebody was targeting him with the evil eye. The fact that some Africans may have a different concept of safety than we (and other Africans) do doesn't make Congolese refugees any less worthy of applying for international protection, but it certainly dents some of the narratives we are used to hearing. As academics and educators, we are invited to dig deeper and seek to understand the more complex strata of reality that are often edited out of many narratives.

On the other hand, I can also train myself to read with the same empathy the research done in London in 1960s about the Maltese being seen as criminals (due to a few stories that news editors chose to give prominence to at the time).²⁸ Many of the Londoners interviewed who had Maltese friends spoke very highly of these friends, deeming them a strange and utter exception, while insisting that the Maltese in general

(namely, all those they did not know) were shady people or criminals.²⁹ Surely, many people in Malta and in Rome today have similar attitudes towards certain groups of migrants; listening to them and helping them listen to themselves may hopefully allow them to see and even admit, at some point, that their narratives may not be entirely objective and consistent. Yet, we cannot approach people living in poorer neighbourhoods where migrants and refugees tend to settle, people who struggle every day with the question of how to make these neighbourhoods safer, cleaner, better served and more liveable for their children, expecting them to abide by their duty to host strangers on our behalf and to talk about their experience of the other in ways which are always consistent and politically correct.

Listening to my students is also part of this process, especially those who hail from certain cultures where students do not dare raise their hand in class, let alone question or challenge an author or a lecturer. One way I do this is by encouraging students to share their ideas on an online "forum" after the lecture,³⁰ and gently nudging the students who are most shy and reserved to join the discussion, and eventually post longer and deeper contributions, one step at a time.

4.4 Seeking Interdisciplinary Approaches

Listening to other disciplines forms part of the "listening" process as well, but here the process is more circular: ethics both listens to, while also challenging, the human sciences and the other religious sciences and theological disciplines. More specifically, in what I teach

²⁸ Geoff Dench, *Maltese in London: A Case-Study in the Erosion of Ethnic Consciousness* (London and Boston, MA: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1975).

²⁹ Idem. For another important study in the liminality of Maltese migrants, cf. Andrea L. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

³⁰ Sui Fai John Mak, Roy Williams, and Jenny Mackness, "Blogs and Forums as Communication and Learning Tools in a MOOC," in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Networked Learning 2010*, ed. Lone Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al. (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 2010), 275–84; Anoush Margaryan, Allison Littlejohn, and Gabrielle Vojt, "Are Digital Natives a Myth or Reality? University Students' Use of Digital Technologies," *Computers & Education* 56, no. 2 (1 February 2011): 429–40, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2010.09.004>.

and publish, I give ample space and consideration to sociology, economics, criminology, history, social psychology and biblical exegesis. Qua sciences, these disciplines tend to seek a “view from nowhere in particular,” or at least to allow the researcher and her readers to distantiate themselves somehow from the reality which they are studying, a reality which they also inhabit as a life-world. Yet, only those who have missed or ignored the grand epistemological debates of the 20th century, or who have little practical knowledge of the world of research, will insist today that the use of one sociological theory, rather than another, the framing and asking of certain questions in a survey, rather than others, or the use of certain assumptions and simplifications in econometrics, rather than others, can be value-neutral.³¹

4.5 Holding Fast to Intellectual Honesty

All this brings us to another important point. We cannot but be selective in what research we use, coming from other disciplines, and in what authors we find useful and fitting with what we teach. I do not give my students texts to read coming from researchers working for think-tanks financed by nativist and anti-immigrant lobbies, or studies patently designed to sustain hard-line ideological positions I deem dangerous or morally unacceptable. Yet, I do make an effort to read - and to offer to my more critical and mature students - serious research coming from authors and perspectives that I do not agree with. In the process, I seek to lay bare their assumptions and methodology, to see whether or not the

³¹ To give one example that illustrates the point, I often point to the debate between David Card, George Borjas and Giovanni Peri regarding whether labour migration is bad for autochthonous US workers. Cf. George J. Borjas, *Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); David Card, “Is the New Immigration Really so Bad?,” *The Economic Journal* 115, no. 507 (1 November 2005): F300–323, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2005.01037.x>; Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, “Additional Case Studies: 10.2 The Borjas versus Card Debate: Is Labour Immigration Bad for U.S. Workers?,” Age of Migration Companion Website, 2012, <http://www.age-of-migration.com/na/resources/casestudies.html>; Giovanni Peri and VasilYasenov, “The Labor Market Effects of a Refugee Wave: Applying the Synthetic Control Method to the Mariel Boatlift” (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2015), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w21801>.

conclusions of such research are indeed warranted alternatives to the positions I cherish and promote as a Catholic ethicist and an educator. If they are, I have an obligation, stemming from intellectual honesty, somewhat to present them to my students. I also have a responsibility to present valid critiques and objections made against the positions and thesis that I (and Catholic Social Thought) support.

4.6 Appealing Intelligently to Religious Traditions

I have just mentioned Catholic Social Thought. As a moral theologian teaching at a Pontifical University, I am expected to promote a certain tradition and to think from within this tradition. In many ways, this is freeing and enriching. I do not have to pretend to be who I’m not, or to offer only partial and secular arguments, which I don’t find entirely convincing, to sustain my claims. In the global North, our students and the general public are more willing to listen to arguments rooted in a religious tradition today than in the past. Yet, being rooted in a tradition is truly freeing and enriching when we stick to intellectual honesty in what we say and teach, when we deeply respect other traditions and non-believers, and when we hold fast to the idea that ethical norms and virtuous practices are binding insofar as they are rational and reasonable (so as to convince the consciences of people of good will), and not simply by virtue of their being promulgated by an authority that speaks on behalf of God, or of their mere antiquity.

4.7 Not Being afraid to Touch the Deeper Issues

The phenomenon of human mobility is a litmus test for the maturity of a democratic society, its ability to serenely and responsibly discuss complex issues regarding its identity and its project for the future. It forces us to think about whether our welfare states are sustainable, about what negative effects of globalization are we ready to put up with, about what kind of people we are ready to die for or support by giving up part of our income for their wellbeing, about what kind of citizens we want the daughters and sons of strangers - and therefore also our children - to become. The notion of sovereignty naturally comes to the fore: to what extent can we *uphold* our countries’ sovereignty when defending our right to keep people out, and to what extent can we *question* the sovereignty of other countries when claiming that we should help migrants

and refugees stay home by effectively forcing their governments to deal with issues of human rights violations and bad governance?

Bringing up such deeper questions in a paper or a lecture hall is challenging, but it helps our readers and students to better understand the causes and hopefully start looking for real solutions to the big problems of our world. Nonetheless, we are often tempted to stick to the safer and simpler world of strategic politics and focused research where we take for granted the political reality that we know and simply deal with the symptoms and the epiphenomena.

Conclusion:

Aiming to Touch the Heart and Challenge the Mind

I have mentioned narratives and imagination before: we need to touch the heart of our students. But as academic institutions, we also need to challenge the mind. Pope Francis, in many ways, encourages us to come down from our ivory towers³² and come out from behind our desks, and our students - constantly bombarded with images, emoticons and telegraphic messages - have little tolerance for complex reasoning and sophisticated concepts. We cannot serve these students without reaching out to them, adapting to their world, and speaking their language. But we cannot, on the other hand, become yet another stall in the supermarket of emotions and superficial ideas.

Whatever we teach, and however we teach it, the dialectic between heart and mind needs to be kept alive. This dialectic will help us find ways to include teaching on the plight of poor migrants and refugees in today's world in a myriad of academic syllabuses, debunking the many myths spread by fearmongers and demagogues. It will allow us, I believe, to engage others effectively on the phenomenon of human mobility and especially on the aspects of this phenomenon which engender fear, anxiety and anger among our students, event attendees and dialogue partners, hence enabling us to respond effectively to the challenge that Pope Francis sets before us.

³² Pope Francis, "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night (15 April 2017)," The Holy See, 15 April 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170415_omelia-veglia-pasquale.html.

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