

**A reflection, in the form of questions,  
about immigration**

**Foundation “Centesimus Annus”**

**Madrid Group**

## *Introduction*

According to the Strategic Plan of Citizenship and Integration of the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues, in recent years Spain together with other countries in Southern Europe evolved from being a country of emigration to being a country of immigration (“since the mid 80s in terms of annual fluxes and since the early 90s in terms of number of immigrants residing in Spain as compared to number of Spanish nationals living outside Spain”).

The implications which, from different perspectives, this phenomenon involved has prompted the Madrid Group of the Foundation “Centesimus Annus” to formulate a series of questions. From a professional and Christian perspective these questions trigger a reflexion *ad intra* – i.e. coming from it as a group or from any of its individual members – and offer a contribution to a debate more serene than party platforms and as free from bias as possible.

## *Methodology*

- In the format it has chosen, the group has developed a series of questions concerning diverse aspects of immigration, with a short introductory note.
- The reason for this format consists basically in the fact that the group is not made up of experts in the field; rather, the questions being asked spring from the uneasiness which the phenomenon of immigration causes to all of us, as professionals, entrepreneurs and above all Christians.

## *1. Immigrations as a social datum*

According to the data provided by the Barometer of the Center of Sociological Research, immigration represents one of the three major worries of Spanish people, together with unemployment and terrorism.

However, immigration is not always viewed as a source of preoccupation. For example, from a strictly economic perspective immigration does not represent a “problem” with negative connotations but a solution to the serious difficulties caused by Spain’s extremely low birth rate and ensuing shortage of people of working age. Consequently, far from considering immigration a problem, the supporters of this theory maintain that in terms of purely economic analysis immigrants have helped counterbalance the shortage of manpower in a developing economy.

The above being taken as premise:

**Is the labor market the only criterion to take into account for the purpose of evaluating immigration?**

**Or, in other words, is it possible to explain the many other factors associated with the phenomenon of immigration by focusing exclusively on its labor or economic dimension?**

On the other hand, the real *problems* attributed to the immigrant population are far from few (poverty, illiteracy, domestic violence, crime...)

**Are these problems much different in nature and intensity from those experienced by a sample of**

**indigenous population of similar cultural level and income: overcrowded housing, theft, prostitution, mafia, despair?**

Limiting the question to legalised immigration – and leaving aside illegal immigration – immigrants need: decent housing, education for their children, health services, easily accessible places to socialize, respect for values and traditions which they prize and are not in contradiction with basic values of the host society, guarantee of equal treatment when applying for jobs.... AND to be considered citizens in every respect, according to the law of the country.

**Keeping in mind all of the above, do you view immigration as a problem or a negative factor?**

Benedict XVI, on the occasion of this year's World Day of Emigrants and Refugees, affirmed that "the reality of migrations should not be viewed only as a problem, but also and above all as a great resource for the progress of humanity"

### ***Multiculturalism and Interculturalism***

One of the most fascinating and disturbing aspects of the phenomenon of immigration is the cultural one. In the old times immigrants adapted to a new society quite easily, thanks to the permeability of social collectivities. In our days, immigrants are faced with societies which are fully formed and culturally developed. Therefore the challenge is so much greater "as it involves the economic,

social, political, health, culture and security spheres. It is a challenge which every Christian must respond to, much beyond the limits of goodwill (...)" (*Exhortation Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, 3)

**How did our western society react to this challenge? Assimilation, cultural hegemony or cultural pluralism, in its variants of multiculturalism and interculturalism?**

**As pointed out by *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, “the evolution from monocultural to multicultural societies can be seen as a sign of the living presence of God in the human community and history, since it offers a providential opportunity to fulfil God’s plan of universal communion”.**

- Taking into consideration the three systems mentioned above, in the case of “*assimilation*” the host society pays no attention to cultural diversity, does not introduce norms or takes action to promote the new cultures. In the case of “*cultural hegemony*” it pretends to separate the institutional and public sphere from the individual one forging a “cultural crucible” as in the U.S. model.
- The third model of cultural pluralism in its variant of *Multiculturalism* looks upon cultures as a value, as a moral asset which one must protect, without attention to individuals; in its variant of *Interculturalism* it pretends not to uproot people, as if they could be moved from one country to another without problems; its mantra is respect and tolerance of diversity.

- Looking at *Interculturalism*, a cross variant of cultural pluralism, should we consider it as the most attractive proposal, at least from a Christian perspective? In our opinion Multiculturalism by placing society or culture above the individual person has certainly failed to promote integration, creating social and cultural ghettos and obstructing cultural interaction. The fundamental pillars of an integration process which avoids all forms of ethnic exclusion are, first and foremost, socioeconomic. If the social elevator is not working the possibilities of conflict will increase.

### *3. Legal aspects of immigration*

- When laws are concerned, our attitude towards foreigners has undergone an extraordinary evolution since Epicure's view of "foreigners" as a an alien body which can be neither helped nor harmed by any norm of a system to which it does not belong. Leaving aside precedents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – and the International Bill of Civil and Political Rights - the individual has acquired a major role in the field of International Rights, which has transformed the very concept of "foreigner".
  
- If we look at Spain, our Constitution on one side – given the time it was approved, 1978 – took stock of the large number of Spanish people living outside the country. Art. 42 read as follows: "The State will give special attention to the protection of the rights of Spanish workers abroad and will orient its policy towards their return".  
On the other side, Art. 13.1 stated that "In Spain foreigners will enjoy the public freedoms guaranteed by the present Title (public rights and freedoms) as established by treaties and law". This has been confirmed by the laws on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain enacted from 1985 on, including the 2000 one now in force and its correlated regulatory applications.
  
- In view of the laws existing in Spain and, above all, in the other member countries of the European Union, and of recognized rights in the field of health

services, Social Security and welfare services, education, etc.

**Can we say that this approach is sufficiently generous? And if so, are immigrants receiving countries which adopt “nominal call” policies making a mistake?**

**Is it right to set up a system which takes for granted that there will always be illegal immigrants? Or, instead, is it right to take more efficient steps to ensure that immigrants become convinced that it is better to comply with the law rather than infringe it?**

- **Already John XXIII invoked the right to emigrate, founded on the universal destination of the earth’s goods (Mater et Magistra), as John Paul II reminded us. On this principle and on the basis of what has recently been rediscovered concerning open societies (a concept which Henry Bergson uses in his book “The two sources of ethics and religion” and Popper in his well known work “Open society and its enemies”) are the structures envisaged by the norms which have been introduced by different States to regulate matters pertaining to immigration still valid?**

#### ***4. Economic aspects of immigration***

Economists generally define immigration as a positive shock for the job market, in as much as it increases available manpower and exerts downward pressure on salaries (George J. Borjas, The economic consequences of immigration, Journal of Economics Literature, No. 32).

According to the data provided by the report of the “Oficina Economica del Presidente” (Immigration and Spanish Economy: 1996/2006) of the 2.63 million jobs created between 2001 and 2005 1.32 million have gone to immigrants, i.e. more than half.

Keeping in mind these general premises, and without discounting the reflections we made concerning immigration as a social factor,

- a) Do immigrants come to Spain to fill unskilled jobs because they have no education?**
- b) Are we refusing some jobs which immigrants are willing to take?**
- c) Is it possible to think of a transparent contractual policy which will offer the immigrant candidate temporary residence papers, with facilitations for the return to his/her country once he/she has reached his/her economic goal or when there is no longer work for him/her in Spain?**
- d) Do we in many cases condone contracts without guarantees?**
- e) If there are jobs not filled, is it right to deny others the possibility to apply?**

**f) Is the quota system a good solution or are we simply trying to shut doors?**

From an economic viewpoint how does immigration affect public services such as schools, health plans, welfare, housing, etc....

**a) Can we pay for the expense caused by immigration? Should we? Does the concept of welfare state as provider of services – especially schooling and health – available to all but at the same time perforce limited, lose value? What is the State's role towards immigration and in which measure can its basic principles of social and economic policy be applied to this matter?**

**b) Should we establish immigrant “quotas” by country, language, professional qualification.... as some European countries have done?**

**c) Is it feasible to implement a systematic policy of friendly gestures aiming to highlight the benefits of immigration, to change its image, to offset the view of immigration as a burden on the services provided by the State?**

**d) Finally, from a macroeconomics viewpoint, should we encourage a different approach in countries which export emigrants?**

John Paul II's message for the 2004 World Day of Emigrants and Refugees already referred to the right **not** to emigrate: “As regards emigrants and refugees, creating practical conditions of peace presupposes a serious

commitment to defend, first of all, *the right not to emigrate*, i.e. to live in peace and dignity in one's own country.

## ***5. Educational aspects of immigration***

In the field of education, problems such as level of learning, socialising difficulties, overcrowding of public schools, etc. are a daily experience. Furthermore, it is easy to notice that different cultures and social status among immigrants cause them to react very differently to educational and school values .

On the other hand, according to various studies (among others, Immigration, School and the Labor Market, published by the Fundaçion La Caixa), whereas the majority of children (Spanish or immigrant) is taught at public schools, the trend seems to be for Spanish children to move to private schools while immigrant children stay with the public system.

- a) Does Spanish law address this new phenomenon adequately? Are the projects and programs being implemented satisfactory in terms of multiculturalism or interculturalism?**
  
- b) Is access to schooling a sufficient right or should the consequence be that education must be provided according to real criteria of equal opportunity? Should one enforce integration imposing percentage quotas of immigrant children in each school to break barriers to immigrants' right of access? Are there other solutions which the State could adopt?**

**c) What is the role of fathers in the field of education as regards the relationship between immigrant children and our own children at school?**

### ***6. A Christian attitude to immigration***

Faced with this long list of interrogatives and multiple answers and reflections due to different perspectives, we would like to consider one last question:

**Do I feel the obligation, as a person and member of a community, to contribute to a project that would allow people who are now emigrants to live in peace and dignity in their own country?** The parable of the rich Epulon and the beggar Lazarus says: **not even if one should rise from the dead would we be convinced. Are we, as persons and Christians, conscious of the reality of immigration ? Do we entertain doubts about our way of living?**

As Christians we believe there is one obligatory premise: nobody should be indifferent to the conditions in which so many emigrants find themselves. They are at the mercy of events and have often lived through tragic circumstances. The world of emigrants can give a significant contribution to the consolidation of peace. They can facilitate interaction and understanding among people and communities, and among different civilizations.

This fruitful intercultural dialogue represents “*a necessary step towards building a reconciled world*” (John Paul II).

We are aware of a feeling of fraternity and joy when we see immigrants participating in functions of the universal Church, not to mention the dynamism they have

contributed to their respective parish communities. But we must ask of ourselves – especially in view of our status of professionals and entrepreneurs – an attitude of utmost respect and commitment also outside church surroundings if we are to achieve an atmosphere of true Christian amity.

- From a Christian perspective our primary goal must be to facilitate integration with an ecumenical and interreligious approach that takes into account the great cultural diversities of new immigrants.
- We must encourage immigrants to cooperate actively to achieve integration, which depends on many factors and the goodwill of many. The role of host societies and our own role of Christians, ready and committed to welcome them “promoting understanding and acknowledgement of true human values in an intercultural perspective” (Benedict XVI’s letter to the President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences) is to promote a sincere dialogue, without complexes or renounces “let us welcome each other as Christ welcomes us, to the glory of God” (Romans 5, 7)
- As the Exhortation *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* says, “the passage from monocultural to multicultural societies can be seen as a sign of the living presence of God in the human community and in history, since it offers a providential opportunity to fulfil God’s plan of universal communion” .

On the other hand, the immigrant population in Spain does not exclusively profess the Catholic religion. Getting to know other cultures “with an appropriate critical approach and solid ethical reference points” fosters a better knowledge of the values and limits of our own culture

and reveals the existence of a common heredity shared by all human beings.

Immigration undoubtedly offers Christians a powerful motivation to separate faith from a given cultural context (ours) and to achieve personal allegiance. We must take special care to conciliate the dualism Christian acceptance/duty of integration versus the defence of our principles and values, without falling into discriminatory dogmas.

Let us end with John Paul II's words: we respect immigrants when we use every mean to promote a culture of welcome and a culture of peace, which smooth differences and pursue dialogue, though without falling into forms of indifference when values are being questioned. This generously open attitude translates into an offer and conditions of peace. If one promotes gradual integration among all immigrant groups, respecting their identity and, at the same time, safeguarding the host society's cultural patrimony, there will be far fewer risks that immigrants congregate in real "ghettoes" insulating themselves from the social context.

## **7. The Christian community's contribution**

**In view of all of the above, what can the Church do (parishes and communities, publications, media, Christian movements, etc.) to better welcome immigrants?**

The presence of other religious communities in our country has deeply changed the reality we were used to, given that for centuries we have had practically one religious community only, the Catholic one.

In this new religious framework our Catholic community – with its universal vocation – will tend to look upon the great challenge of promoting acceptance as one of the evangelical values. The other Christian communities do likewise, in pursuance of ecumenical values (hence a joint celebration of welcome to foreigners in a communal liturgy intended to promote an intense education effort with interaction between immigrants and natives, and a sounder foundation of faith through knowledge of the Scriptures, of Church history and of the Christian message interpretation) as other religious confessions do.

One of the major consequences of the changed religious landscape in our society is not so much the plurality introduced by migrations, but an increased lack of any faith. This is the challenge which we and all other religious confessions must confront. We must enhance our contribution and defend our rights in a society which must necessarily be organized on a platform of healthy laicism. From this viewpoint it is much more constructive to look for factors of agreement among the different

Christian communities and religious confessions than to underline the aspects which separate us.